mindful

Your Guide to Difficult Emotions

SPECIAL EDITION

YOUR GUIDE TO DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

GET STARTED WITH **mindfulness**

mindful SPECIAL EDITION

HOW TO navigate anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, shame... and **build resilience**

PLUS ADVICE FROM
Sharon Salzberg, Patricia Rockman, Zindel Segal, and **Jewel**

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"You can't be of service to anybody else unless you are taking care of yourself. That's how I see mindfulness."

Tina Runyan, PhD, ABPP
Clinical Psychologist and Professor
Department of Family Medicine
UMass Medical School

Mindfulness in Action™

Learning to Put Your Oxygen Mask on First

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Having trained Family Medicine residents for several years, Tina has seen first-hand how stressful the work can be. "After a year or two, many doctors in training feel demoralized and question whether they've chosen the right career path." That uncertainty can lead to burnout and affect patient care and outcomes.

As a student of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) at the UMass Center for Mindfulness, Tina saw an opportunity to help residents meet the day-to-day pressure of caring for others. There's a reason flight attendants tell you to put your oxygen mask on first, she says. That's because you can't help others if you're not taking care of yourself. "Mindfulness can put all healthcare providers in a better position to really tune into what our patients need."

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YOUR GUIDE TO DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

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Practices

Follow this symbol to find exercises, practices and tips that will help you begin to use, and experience the benefits of mindfulness in your life right now.

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Fear

Anxiety

Anger

Sadness

Shame

Resilience

BARRY BOYCE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
MINDFUL AND MINDFUL.ORG

Welcome to our fifth special issue in the Get Started with Mindfulness Series. Here, we're taking on emotions that challenge us and can disrupt our composure every day—sometimes more than once, sometimes repeatedly. These familiar frenemies include: anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, shame.

Yes, frenemies. We know these feelings so well, they are like familiar friends we are used to hanging out with, but they also drive us crazy. When we are in the grip of a difficult emotion, it can be hard to get perspective. We see the whole world through the lens of that particular emotion. If we're anxious, the future is always grim. When fearful, every possibility is a threat. When angry, no one and no situation can please us. When sadness grips us, there is no room for even a sliver of joy. When we're overcome with shame, everyone is judging us and finding us wanting, reinforcing our belief that we are just plain bad.

Where does mindfulness fit into all of this? Will a little bit of paying attention to the breath tame these mental monsters?

That's unrealistic—and unnecessary.

Underlying each of our negative emotions is a kernel of truth, albeit one that has gotten out of hand. Affective psychologists, who study our emotional landscape, believe that all emotions have an adaptive purpose. Fear and anxiety help us to respond rapidly to real threats, anger helps us draw a firm line about what's right and what's wrong. Sadness slows things down and helps us adapt to loss. An acceptable dose of shame helps us take into account what others may need from us to live together harmoniously.

By increasing our attention and focus, mindfulness practice can give us enough steadiness to curiously explore these emotions as they arise—without jumping to act on them or get pulled into their spiral. We may be able to separate the part of the emotion that contains an intelligent response from the part that has grown beyond its useful life and become excessive and destructive. A short burst of anger may snap things into shape; a daily diet of rage and retribution can harm the minds and bodies of everyone in the vicinity.

Please take a bit of time to explore this precarious inner landscape with some of the best mindfulness teachers around today. May you find relief and insight in equal measure.

How Meditating Helps with Difficult Emotions

If you think mindfulness is all peacefulness and calm, you'll be surprised to discover that it can put you up close and personal with your emotions. And that's a good thing.

Stop being so emotional! Has anyone ever said this to you? Has it actually helped? You can try to push down your emotions and get them to change, but that's like playing whack-a-mole. Whatever you push down in one place just pops up somewhere else. You work hard to calm yourself down about a snub at work only to find yourself yelling at your daughter later.

Yes, emotions can be challenging, but you wouldn't want to stop them altogether. They're a big part of how we sense and respond to the world. Without them, we'd be like robots. Music wouldn't move us. Loss wouldn't affect us. Nothing would bring us to tears. Nothing would make us fall down laughing, either. But sometimes emotions do wreak havoc, and even spread pain in our lives. And that's where meditation comes in.

Contrary to what some people believe, meditation does not make us emotionless. It also doesn't turn all emotions into fluffy bliss. When we're doing mindfulness meditation, if we feel jealous, we feel it: the pain, the guilt, the whole enchilada. What also happens, though, is that there's a little space around the emotion. We can see it for what it is.

Emotions combine thoughts ("John's being kind of a jerk") with feelings (hurt, angry), which cause reactions (a clenched jaw, a bad mood begins to form). This pattern—thought, feeling, reaction—happens quickly and can gather momentum.

When you meditate, you see this process *as it's happening*. You notice how the emotion feels, and *where* you feel it. You're like a scientist. You're not trying to change the emotion or judge it. You just observe and let it be.

What happens next is pretty amazing: You see that the *emotion isn't permanent*; that all emotions come in waves.

Going deeper, you start to see layers. At first jealousy may seem negative and undesirable, but if you can sit with it and let it be, you may discover that underneath the jealousy is something else. Perhaps there's an energy present, fuel for inspiration. When you strip away the damaging, aggressive ingredient in the emotion, something powerful and beneficial can remain. You see the possibility of riding an emotion's power without harming others or yourself. You also can choose how to act, rather than be driven to act. This is what it means to tame your emotions through meditation.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DIMITRIJE TANASKOVIC / STOCKSY UNITED

3 Ways Acceptance Puts You in the Driver's Seat

by ZINDEL SEGAL

1 Allowing negative emotions to exist in your awareness—for the moment—does not mean you won't take action. It does mean registering the presence of the emotions before making a choice about how to respond. It's a deliberate movement of attention.

2 Denying negative emotions is risky for your mental health. Being unwilling to experience negative thoughts, feelings, or sensations is often the first link in a mental chain that can lead to the formation of automatic, habitual, and critical patterns. By shifting the basic stance of "not wanting" an emotion to allowing and letting that emotion to be present, you alter this process.

3 Acceptance also helps you understand how to be more caring and supportive of yourself during an unpleasant experience. Staying with the feeling and the accompanying sensations, you'll begin to notice things like how anxiety may show up as tightness in the chest, or sadness as heaviness in the shoulders. Over time, this experiential practice can show you that you can allow unpleasant experiences and still be OK.

fear

Fear is primal. And it's essential for survival. It heightens our senses and helps us deal with threatening situations. But when fear continually generates in our own minds, it makes us anxious. If we learn to let the intense energy of fear dissipate, it can become a powerful driving force.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MANUEL CHILLAGANO / STOCKSY UNITED

FACE FEAR *and keep going*

Welcoming our fear turns out to be the best way to conquer it. Over and over again.

by CAROLYN GIMIAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY LIAM GRANT / STOCKSY UNITED

Life is frightening. That thought came over me the morning after the mass killings in Paris in November 2015. Events like this evoke many responses: sadness, fear, anger, hoping it won't happen to me, worrying about whether friends and family are all right, wondering how to help. It also highlights the necessity to work with our own fear, from the little niggling fears we have to the biggest challenges we face in life. Where do we find courage? Where do we find solutions?

It seems there are no sweeping answers that magically calm our fear and anxiety. However, some hints may be close at hand. For intertwined with fear, we discover fearlessness. This was highlighted by the response of citizens in Paris on Twitter, immediately following the attacks: People used the hashtag #porteouverte—Door Open—to offer shelter to those affected by the bombs and shootings who needed a place to spend the night, who could not get home, who needed a refuge from the terror. *Come here, our door is open to you.* That message of fearlessness and human solidarity is one we can celebrate in these frightening times.

More mundanely, how can we connect an event like the Paris attacks or those tragedies on our own soil to the everyday fear we feel?—the fears we encounter when shopping for a bathing suit, taking a flight, or just looking at the day ahead?

If we are human, we are capable of fear, and we will all know fear at some time. Of course, it's not just humans who feel fear. Animals, too, experience this primal emotion. In *Animals in Translation*, Temple Grandin writes: "The single worst thing you can do to an animal emotionally is to make it feel afraid. Fear is so bad for animals I think it's worse than pain."

Fear is something ancient and ingrained. It has its helpful place as a survival mechanism in nature, triggering awareness of a threat and triggering responses such as flight, freeze, or fight. In the study of the human brain, the amygdala has often been considered the "fear center," and it is definitely involved in our responses to fear. But recent research suggests that the amygdala is not the all-powerful Czar of Fear. As neuroscientist Joseph E. LeDoux explains, "Be suspicious of any statement that says a brain area is a center responsible for some function."

LeDoux points to the complexity and the interconnectedness of our experience of fear, which is not just a question of how the brain functions but also is reflected in our psychological experience of fear. The complex nature of fear may be why one-shot solutions are not always effective and why we need broader and more inclusive approaches.

Sometimes there does seem to be a simple solution to our fear. If someone abuses you, you might think that if you stop the abuse, you should be able to stop the fear associated with it. But does that work? The best we could say is "Sort of." You may not have to fear being actually abused by a particular person again, but it's likely you will still imagine or relive the abuse and that you may be very anxious about the possibility of being abused by someone else. You may have a difficult time trusting people at all. There is more work to be done to conquer the trauma associated with your fear.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEATRIX BOROS / STOCKSY UNITED

It seems there are no sweeping answers that magically calm our fear and anxiety. However, some hints may be close at hand. For intertwined with fear, we discover fearlessness.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ISAIAH & TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY / STOCKSY UNITED

Rather than centralizing the fear within yourself, see it and let it go.

Since there is no single "fear center" in the brain, perhaps our responses to fear need to be just as nuanced. For example, fear and anxiety are closely interconnected. Anxiety is a very common if not universal experience. Many things make us anxious, but we wouldn't necessarily say we're afraid of all of them. You may feel anxious before a job interview; you might not be afraid of going to the interview. We can think of the difference between fear and anxiety as a matter of degree, or as a way to distinguish between a threat and a challenge. Taking an exam may be challenging, but not necessarily threatening.

Whac-A-Mole or Welcome Mat

Anxiety may be anticipatory worrying, but it can also be generalized unease. Most people experience anxiety, which can be low level, ongoing, episodic, or sometimes crippling—in which case medical and/or psychological help is called for. With ordinary anxiety, we usually look for the cause of the anxiousness and try to correct it, but again, it's not so simple. It can become like a game of Whac-A-Mole. You subjugate one cause of anxiety and up pops the next thing. It can feel endless. A common strategy is to treat the symptom, the anxiety itself, by self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, or finding other solutions, from sex to shopping. There's nothing wrong with a new dress or a new fling, necessarily, but as habitual responses to anxiety, they can become crippling addictions themselves. And do they work? If they did, we wouldn't have to keep drinking or shopping so frantically.

The alternative is to work with the anxiety as it presents itself, without necessarily seeking a cause or expecting an immediate solution. Welcome it, even, as part of an Open Door policy. "There you are again! Hello, come on in." Interestingly, vulnerability and gentleness toward ourselves and our feelings can reduce fear and anxiety. The practice of mindfulness meditation, as well as other mindfulness and contemplative techniques, can be invaluable ways to lay out a welcome mat in situations of fear and anxiety.

An approach I've found helpful is called Touch and Let Go. When a feeling such as fear presents itself during meditation, the touch part is that you acknowledge or welcome the fear. You don't push it away. You really take a look. You don't have to dwell on it or build it up. If it's a strong feeling or emotion, it'll do that for itself!

Having welcomed your fear or anxiety, you let it go. This is far from a one-shot solution. The fear may remain after you release it, or it may come up over and over again. Let it be there. Make friends with it. Then, breathing out, let the fear go, out into space. Meditating with your eyes open may also help you feel the contrast between the anxiety and the space around. Rather than centralizing the fear within yourself, see it and let it go.

Fear contains a great deal of energy. It can be a source of courage. When something makes us afraid, it shocks us, but it also perks us up.

Helping Others to Open the Door

In addition to working with personal fear and anxiety, each of us has the ability to help others overcome and work with their fears. Even the most fearful person can lend a hand, in the right circumstance. When you have the chance and the ability to help, seize the moment: Even noticing someone else's anxiety or fear can be helpful to him or her. You can assist by just sharing that space. You might practice meditation together, take a walk, sit in silence. If you're helping someone else, you'll be helping yourself as well. The world gets bigger when you notice the other people in it. Sometimes, it seems difficult to extend a finger, let alone a hand, to others, especially when one's own anxiety or depression is great. But just by lifting our gaze ever so slightly to include another, we can often cheer someone up a little and also cheer up ourselves.

Sometimes a person or a group has the opportunity to change a great deal for other people in the world—for better or for worse. The terrorists in Paris acted for worse. On the other hand, Canada recently elected a prime minister, Justin Trudeau, whom the New York Times called an antidote to cynicism and "a leader who can restore pride to high office and rekindle the national spirit." This "for better" moment surely will pass. Like the awful events in France, such moments are quite unexpected. Still, we shouldn't underestimate our ability to influence our world. As we can see, the world needs us all to pitch in. Change needn't begin on a grand scale. Like the Parisian #porteouverte, small gestures can sometimes have profound effects.

The interesting thing, then, is that the other side of fear is fearlessness. The word "anxious" does not only express fear or worry. If your parents say they are "anxious" to meet your boyfriend or girlfriend, it may make you "anxious," but they are eager—not apprehensive. Similarly, fear contains a great deal of energy. It can be a source of courage. When something makes us afraid, it shocks us, but it also perks us up.

Not long after the tragic events in Paris, an email arrives in my inbox, inviting me to join the global community to say: *Nous Sommes Unis*, "We are One," asking us all to share a message of solidarity in response to the awful events in Paris. A spark of courage can find us at the worst of times.

In darkness, many have remarked, we find the stars that can light our path. It's advice that applies as much to our individual experience as it does to societal disasters. In the darkest hours, take your telescope and look for a star, listen to an owl hooting at the moon, or meditate in your chair and wink at the next fear that comes your way. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIEL OZON / STOCKSY UNITED

Sometimes the help you need is to talk with someone about your fears. Sometimes it's simply sharing a good meal and a laugh with a friend.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SANTI NUNEZ / STOCKSY UNITED

Take It Easy on Yourself

Although working with fear in meditation is extremely valuable, it's equally important to develop ways of working with fear and anxiety in everyday life. Here are some suggestions:

Don't beat yourself up
Don't blame yourself for your fears or anxiety. They're human responses to the human condition. Try to suspend harsh self-judgments. Don't expect to conquer fear in one breath, one hour, or one day.

Take time for yourself
Fear thrives when we push too hard. Appreciate yourself in small moments and small acts: take a walk, smell a flower, drink a good cup of coffee, watch an absorbing movie.

Do something differently
Alter a routine. By shifting a habitual pattern, you take yourself off autopilot. It may make you a little more anxious, but it also makes you more mindful and aware. And by working with small anxieties, you can learn about the bigger anxiety and fear in your life and how to handle it. The change could be small and almost silly: brush your hair before you brush your teeth, if you usually do the opposite. Wear something you never would, an outlandish scarf or hat. If you're compulsively early, leave five minutes later for an appointment. Mix it up. Do something that makes you a little uncomfortable. If this backfires, remember point one.

Celebrate the victories
They may be small. You're afraid of spiders, but you managed to trap one and put it out of the house. You're terrified of thunder and lightning, but you opened the curtains during a storm. Give yourself a mental pat on the back or a genuine piece of chocolate.

Make a catalog of daily fears
Get to know your fears and anxieties. Set aside a few minutes, and in that time, notice all the fearful or anxious thoughts that arise, and what triggers them. If this exercise makes you more and more anxious, don't do it! But often noting fears and letting them come to the surface helps reduce some of the anxiety. It's a good beginning.

Practice touch and let go in everyday life
Let the fears arise, but also let them go. After you make the catalog, look at each fear, each anxious moment, and then let it go on its way.

Be curious about your fear
We give power to our anxieties by trying to hide from them. Ignorance is certainly not bliss. Rather, it stokes the fires of fear. So look into what frightens you. Look at the big face of fear and look into the details. You may discover that fear is like the Wizard of Oz, a showman with little substance and much bravado. Or you may find something more substantial. Then, look more deeply, but with kindness to yourself.

Never forget humor
One of the best antidotes to fear is humor, in the sense of celebrating life, not making fun of yourself or others. Daily life offers a pretty steady stream of humorous encounters. It's hard to be terrified when you have a broad grin on your face.

Accept help
Sometimes the help you need is to talk with someone about your fears. Sometimes it's sharing a good meal and a laugh with a friend. A small note of caution: Accepting help doesn't necessarily mean taking everybody's advice. Seek professional help if you need it.

Open the door wide to your fear and anxiety
Touch it. Be curious about it. Then let it go. See the contrast between your anxiety and the space around it.

by CAROLYN GIMIAN

Recognizing the Fear

Just understanding that fear is present can help prevent it from taking over.

As you **notice** your heart pumping more, your chest tightening, your back stiffening, let an imaginary alarm bell go off in your head. Take 3 or 10 or 20 deep breaths, however many you need to **slow** your body down. Place your hand on your heart if that will help. Acknowledge to yourself, "I'm scared. I'm afraid." **Name the fear** so you automatically create a bit of distance between yourself and the intensity of the emotional reaction.

Say a few phrases of **well-wishing** toward yourself and for others:

May (I/others) see the source of our fear.
May (I/others) be safe and free from fear.
May (I/others) be happy and at ease.

Tip

Whenever you feel the energy of fear, don't avoid the feeling. Sit with it. As fearful thoughts of dread and worry continue to arise, approach them with friendliness.

Don't treat them as a threat. Be kind toward yourself for being afraid. See what happens when you hold your ground and let the fear rise in your mind. You may find confidence within.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BLUE COLLECTORS / STOCKSY UNITED

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEATRIX BOROS / STOCKSY UNITED

See It, Feel It

Try these ways of working with your fear. They help you open yourself to the strong emotion, as if it were a friend you're trying to get to know better. You want to know why the fear is the way it is.

1

See the fear

This method uses our logical, examining mind to uncover what fear and anxiety are all about. Ask yourself what you're afraid of. Then ask yourself some questions about what you fear:

What's the worst that can happen?

Can I do anything to change the situation that frightens me?

Look more closely at what you're afraid of. See if you can break it down into smaller pieces.

Is this fear tied up with memories or past experiences?

Am I afraid of something happening now, that happened before, or that I think will happen in the future?

2

Feel the fear

Sit with your fear. How does it feel in your body? Does your breathing change when you're afraid? Do you feel other bodily changes?

Is there an arc to your fear, where it increases, peaks, and then subsides?

If you stay with your fear—neither grasping onto it nor trying to get rid of it—do you find other feelings beneath or within the fear? Do you find any sadness there? Is there anger?

anxiety

We sometimes like to fantasize that life is not precarious and dodgy. But deep down, we know it is. Things change, sometimes suddenly. The future is uncertain. And try as we may, we can't control all the variables in our lives. And that causes...anxiety. Mindfulness puts you in touch with what is making you anxious—and helps you to see those thoughts as less solid and threatening.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PIXEL STORIES / STOCKSY UNITED

How to Be Mindful When You're Anxious

In small doses, anxiety can put us in touch with what we need most. The problem arises when anxiety overwhelms and blocks us.

by MITCH ABBLETT

PHOTOGRAPH BY VISUALSPECTRUM / STOCKSY UNITED

Anxiety is not all bad. It can prompt us to take stock of our actions and life situation. It can give us a psychophysiological flick toward taking corrective, repairing action or artfully dodge oncoming peril. In these ways, a certain amount of anxious ants in our pants is helpful—it's a major component of our in-the-moment motivation for healthy change.

The problem arises when anxiety overwhelms and blocks us. Traditional contemplative tradition refers to a pool of water (representing the mind), with anxious restlessness being the whipped up waters leading to muddiness, a lack of clear seeing to the bottom. When anxiety gets this wild inside us, we don't see ourselves or the world accurately. We distort and react in order to stave off this internal chaos, and we are hindered in our ability to relax into seeing clearly. We have a harder time focusing, and our efficiency in daily life takes a hit. Our brains juice up with the stress hormone cortisol in an ancient attempt to reduce threat, and we're left feeling drained and depleted.

Just Along for the Ride

Imagine yourself on a bus and you're late for an important meeting. You're taking a new route, there are a lot of stops, and the bus is overstuffed with people. You're barely inching forward. Walking might get you there faster.

"How many more stops before mine?" you call up to the driver. He tells you not to worry, that your stop is only three more ahead. Yet you find your thoughts (and blood pressure) amping up even more when the driver waits for an elderly man to amble very slowly up to the bus.

"How much longer 'til we're there?" you ask, a bit testily. "I can't miss my meeting."

This time, the driver just glances at you in his rearview mirror without saying anything.

The passenger next to you says, "We all have somewhere to be, you know."

Your thoughts race faster and your pulse is palpable at your temples. Sweat is making its way out in all the usual places.

And now imagine this bus is whatever "vehicle" you're in during a given day that is not yours to drive, to control. It's most every situation you're in—the contexts where you are much more passenger than driver—and you're just along for the ride.

How much does your increasing blood pressure and rush of thoughts actually move the "bus" any faster? Get you there any sooner?

And now imagine that you're trying to meditate on this bus. Consider the all-too-common experience in meditation wherein you're hoping to "get somewhere" with your sitting—to a happier, more satisfying life that will materialize before the session is over. Or maybe your meditation is a cacophony of monkey-on-methamphetamine thoughts and images. These are the sits when your eye pops open to check the clock, timer, or some evidence of sweet relief from the angst.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LYUBA BURAKOVA / STOCKSY UNITED

When anxiety gets wild inside us, we don't see ourselves or the world accurately. We distort and react in order to stave off this internal chaos.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LUMINA / STOCKSY UNITED

When we're not taking care of ourselves—when we're not sleeping, eating, or moving our bodies adequately—this creates imbalances that contribute to anxiety.

Rumination and the Inner Critic

Research is increasingly clear on how destructive anxious thinking can be. Rumination (or repetitive and passive thinking about negative emotions) has been shown to predict the chronic nature of depressive disorders as well as anxiety symptoms.

As a clinician, I've been trained to spot and address the unhealthy mental habit of repetitive and negatively toned inner chatter that broils our minds and bodies from the inside. And it's not just my patients who ruminate—it's me (hypothetically, of course) telling myself over and over that I'm a "failure" as a father for texting during my son's recital. Or eviscerating a future version of myself as a public speaker based on an open zipper incident while giving a talk last week. Rumination is the run-on self-talk of the mind that has physical and mental agitation as both its fuel and its output. Ruminative worry is toxic to our well-being and clarity of mind.

How to Approach Anxious Thoughts

Research suggests part of the path forward relative to this aspect of anxiety. A 2010 study examined the levels of reported self-compassion, rumination, worry, anxiety, and depression in 271 non-clinical undergraduate students. Results suggested that people with higher levels of reported self-compassion are less likely to report depression and anxiety. The data showed that self-compassion may play the role of buffering the effects of rumination. With mindfulness practice, we can learn how to unhook from rumination and cut ourselves (and others) the slack requisite for increasing clarity and ease of being.

It should be fairly obvious that when we're not taking care of ourselves—when we're not sleeping, eating, or moving our bodies adequately—this creates imbalances that contribute to anxiety. Similarly, when we behave unethically, these actions stir our minds and bodies with the muddy raw ingredients of anxiety. When our parents told us to "clean up our act" as teenagers (or as adults), they were not just making an off-hand swipe at our misdeeds; they were (perhaps unintentionally) taking aim at the very heart of our well-being.

Anxiety is the "check engine light" on our psychophysiological dashboard. It lets us know the system needs some balancing. Agitation is therefore not our enemy; ideally, we see it as a wake-up call for mindfulness practice. ■

Mindful Breathing for Anxiety

Begin this practice by acknowledging the mere presence of anxiety—give a soft, slight internal nod to the thoughts, images, and sensations of worry and anticipatory angst.

Rest in sensations of the breath. Let your attention drop gently onto wherever you feel the breath (nostrils, belly, or perhaps the toes for those more light on their feet).

Penetrate the sense of anxiety in both the body and mind on a deep inhale into the belly.

Visualize the breath coming into and through the restlessness. The breath is not forcing the anxiety away; rather, it's moving into it. Slow, deep belly breathing is important because anxiety often pulls us toward fast, chest-level breathing that actually sparks more physical sensations of anxiety.

Acknowledge the anxiety just as it is on the exhale. Don't try to shove the anxiety out with a sigh or exasperated puffing. Again, stay with slow, deliberate breathing. Note the sensations and word-images as if jousting with them using a feather.

Continue following the breath, circulating between penetration into the space of awareness with the in-breath, acknowledging what remains on the exhale.

Don't force or control. Follow the anxiety just as it is, and simply penetrate through it with slow, deep breathing. Allow awareness to seep into and around these thoughts, sensations, and images.

Take inventory of what remains after your allotted meditation time. What is there to be witnessed, felt, and acknowledged "behind" the anxiety? Take action to care for what needs tending.

by MITCH ABBLETT

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARKO MILOVANOVIĆ / STOCKSY UNITED

Facing Down Fear & Anxiety with Jewel

Singer-songwriter Jewel is no stranger to anxiety. Here she shares the mindful practices that have kept her steady through the ups and downs of an unconventional childhood and rise to fame.

Growing up in a musical homesteading family that helped to settle the 49th state, Jewel's childhood was an eclectic mashup of living off the land, horseback riding under the midnight summer sun, performing in bars and honkytonks throughout Anchorage with the family act, and an affinity for Socrates, Plato, and the work of Charles Darwin despite suffering from serious dyslexia.

It was also unstable and increasingly abusive. After Jewel's mother left when she was 8, she and her two brothers were raised by her father. Life as a musician wasn't easy, and her dad turned more and more to alcohol, Jewel says, leading to explosive bursts of anger and physical abuse, which prompted her to move out at age 15.

Living on her own, hitchhiking to work so she could pay the rent while still in school, Jewel knew she was at great risk of "becoming a statistic." "If you look at my life at any stage, you might've said, 'This girl will never make it,' and you probably would've been right."

She also faced mounting anxiety and panic brought on by the pressure of being a teenager trying to navigate the adult world. Journaling her thoughts, meditation, and visualizations she developed for herself helped quell the fear.

She left Alaska after earning a scholarship to a performing arts high school in Michigan her junior year. During school breaks, lacking the funds to go home, she would "hobo" around—bus, train, and hitchhike—guitar in hand, and write songs along the way. One time, she made it all the way to Mexico and back. She was 16.

Following graduation, Jewel headed to San Diego. After turning down the advances of a creepy employer and subsequently losing her job, she could no longer pay rent and ended up living out of her car. She shoplifted food, struggled with agoraphobia, and suffered from chronic kidney infections. She was poor, sick, isolated, and depressed—exactly where she had determined she would never be.

"I had become a statistic," she says. "I was very disappointed in myself."

Talking about this time, Jewel recognizes that she was suffering a kind of post-traumatic stress. She was just 18 and having to navigate the world without guidance and little to no material or emotional resources. So, she relied on the mindful practices she developed years earlier as her lifeline. She also began visiting the public library and reading about neuroscience, fascinated by the notion that she could change the way she perceived her experience.

This curiosity laid a trail of breadcrumbs that would guide her back to a healthier outlook.

She doubled down on observing where her mind was leading her, creating gaps in her thinking, breaking up her "habit loops," and "curating" healthier thoughts. Each day she began noting any little thing she could feel grateful for. She practiced replacing negative thoughts with positive ones.

It worked. "My anxiety began to calm down, one thought at a time," she says.

"I didn't know what mindfulness was. Nobody did back then that I was aware of. I developed these exercises of necessity," she explains. "It was just, I need solutions that work so I have a better experience of life, because I was really unhappy and tremendously uncomfortable.

"I realized," she says, "that my happiness begins and ends with me."

by KELLE WALSH

Ideas to Live By

In her pursuit of emotional fitness, Jewel developed numerous maxims and principles she still lives by. Here are a few of them.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS OWYOUNG

Listen to guided versions of Jewel's mindfulness practices online at mindful.org/guide/emotions

anger

It can ruin any situation. If it stays locked up inside, it can make us sick. It also has awesome power. Anger is a strong and fascinating emotion. Rich and complex, anger benefits from contemplative time and investigation. There's a lot to learn about what's going on beneath our outbursts.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER WEY / STOCKSY UNITED

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVGENIYA SAVINA / STOCKSY UNITED

Taming the Raging Fires Within

Anger is the trickiest element in our human emotional inheritance. It's an inner fuel that offers an addictive rush. How can we handle its awesome power?

by MARGARET CULLEN AND GONZALO BRITO PONS

It's such a shame to think of how often we deride ourselves, and each other, for being "emotional." It's like jumping on someone for breathing. Emotion is a process that is a vital part of being alive. As the pioneering affective psychologist Paul Ekman has said, emotion is a kind of rapid, automatic appraisal of what's going on. It's influenced by our evolutionary past as well as our personal past, such that when "we sense that something important to our welfare is occurring... a set of physiological changes and emotional behaviors begins to deal with the situation."

You've been endowed with a nervous system that has evolved over thousands of generations in a way that you didn't choose. By the time you actually realize that you have a mind and a brain, the basic rules of how they work are already in place. The events that trigger our emotional responses are sometimes universal and sometimes personal. Almost anyone would feel fear at the sight of an oncoming car, but only some of us are afraid of hiking down steep trails while others happily scramble down them like a mountain goat. The triggers that each of us carries with us often come from early childhood and can continue quite unconsciously into adulthood. And opportunities for emotion abound.

Remembering, talking about, or imagining a past emotional scene or thinking of future scenarios can trigger emotions. Observing another person's emotions (even on a TV screen) can elicit an emotional response. Role playing or theater can elicit emotion, and so can seeing an event that offends our sensibilities, like someone talking on a cell phone at the symphony or throwing trash into the street.

One of our most potent emotions—whose inward and outward effects can have disastrous consequences—is anger. In evolutionary terms, its main adaptive function is to remove obstacles that thwart us. When we feel anger, it's because the primitive brain is trying to tell us something needs to change. We share this emotion with other mammals and even with reptiles. Baby humans come already well equipped with the capacity to get angry. If you hold a baby by her arms from behind, preventing her from grabbing a toy, she will get pretty angry, furrowing her brow, tightening her muscles, trying to move forcefully to get the toy, and perhaps shouting with a squeaky voice. When the baby grows up, she can have an analogous reaction when someone cuts her off on the road, especially if she's already late for an important meeting! Anger also shows up when you—or others you feel connected to—are treated unjustly, or when someone or something prevents you from meeting your goals and needs.

Becoming aware of the inner terrain of anger can help you catch an upset sooner, sparing yourself and others.

Regardless of what triggers them, emotional responses can be either functional or dysfunctional. If we automatically swerve away from an oncoming car, the fear response is extremely functional. If we're afraid to leave the house for fear something terrible will happen, we are now in a disorder that is on the very dysfunctional side of fear, a disorder that no doubt is being triggered by an imported script from past trauma.

Until around the 1970s, it was commonly believed that the nervous system was essentially fixed throughout adulthood, that brain functions remained constant, and that it was impossible for new neurons to develop after birth. If you were born with a "glass half-empty" attitude, it would be a life sentence of unhappiness. Neuroscience has changed all that with the concept of neuroplasticity, which suggests that, in reality, human brains are flexible and change through experience. Although there are some fixed rules about what minds and brains can do, it's also true that there is a space of freedom to respond rather than react that can be cultivated through mindful observation and practice. And in that space, we have an opportunity to work creatively with the dysfunctional aspects and enhance the more functional aspects of our emotional life.

Consciously or not, we're constantly training our minds and brains to respond to circumstances. By virtue of repetition, our reactions crystallize into emotional patterns and neural pathways, which, in turn, influence the way we perceive reality. This is particularly true when we're in the grips of a strong emotion, which is sometimes called the refractory period, a period of time when we're only able to take in information and evoke memories that confirm, maintain, or justify the emotion we are feeling. This same mechanism that guides and focuses our attention can also distort our ability to deal with both new information and knowledge already stored that does not match the current emotion. We can all think of countless examples when we have missed obvious cues or forgotten historical data when we were "blinded" by a strong emotion. It's not called "blind rage" for nothing.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALAN SHAPIRO / STOCKSY UNITED

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHELSEA VICTORIA / STOCKSY UNITED

Brain science has demonstrated that each time anger is expressed it gets rehearsed and strengthened. The idea that if you let your anger out you will reach peace and calm is simply not true.

Blind and Blaming

Although it's quite possible to get mad at ourselves, the energy of anger is generally directed outward and it's often linked with blame. This tendency to blame, strike out, punish, and retaliate makes anger especially challenging to sit with, and a big source of interpersonal suffering. When we feel anger toward someone, our sense of "self" and "other" gets very solid. In this state, we exaggerate all the negative qualities of the other person and become blind to positive attributes, which in turn feeds the aversion. The complexity and nuance of the other is reduced to a monolithic negative cartoon called "the enemy."

We often wonder why we're angriest at those we're closest to. For one thing, people who know us intimately also know what can hurt us the most. Someone said, "Your family knows how to push your buttons because they actually installed them." But a less glib reason is that it tends to be safer to show anger to an intimate than to a stranger. You can express aggression to your partner when you're actually mad at your boss, probably because it's less likely your partner will fire you. We can be frustrated about ourselves but direct our anger outside. It's uncanny that we can even get quite angry at inanimate objects—a door, a table, a wall, or a shoe.

And that very fact reveals something that illuminates what's really happening: although it feels as if the source of anger is out there, the anger comes from within. Other people are just pretending to be the real enemies. In fact, it's possible to see them as our "patience coaches," offering us opportunities to explore and tame the anger habit. If everyone was nice and considerate, how could we train in patience, how could we learn to tame our anger?

There's an old story about a man who was sailing his boat on a clear and sunny day, when a dense fog rolled in. Just as he had decided to return to shore, he noticed the profile of another boat coming in his direction. "Keep your distance!" the boatman shouted, concerned about a possible collision. But the other boat just kept approaching. The boatman used all his skills to swiftly shift direction, so there was more room for the other boat. He got really upset when he saw that the other boat changed its own course, now coming directly to him. "Stay out of my way!" he shouted again, but the other boat just kept coming closer, until it finally crashed into his boat.

The man was enraged: "You idiot! What the hell are you doing?!" He got totally worked up and continued his rampage until the fog lifted enough so that he was able to see that the other boat was empty—it was just an old abandoned boat floating downstream. Now he was perplexed and frustrated: To whom could he express his anger? Could he project his anger onto an empty boat? Without a person to blame, it was impossible to keep the story of anger going.

Ask yourself: Do I ever get mad at "empty boats"? If so, where does this anger come from? Where does it go? Becoming aware of the inner terrain of anger can be helpful in catching it sooner and sparing ourselves and others the hurt and regret that often ensue from acting out anger. To work with anger, we need to see the space between trigger and reaction in order to mindfully look within.

Door Number Four

Anger is tricky because there's a cost both to showing anger and to suppressing it. Suppressing doesn't actually solve anything. It only postpones having to deal with anger while it keeps quietly simmering under the surface, wreaking havoc with our bodies. But if we show it, almost invariably we either hurt others or provoke retaliation. Another common habit is unconsciously "feeding" the mind states of anger with our stories of blame and victimization, thereby reinforcing the anger habit.

It's rare that therapists nowadays advise their clients to act out their anger with real or symbolic others (punching pillows, shouting loudly in an empty room, and so on), partially because brain science has demonstrated that each time anger is expressed it gets rehearsed and strengthened. The idea that if you let your anger out you will reach peace and calm is simply not true—the satisfaction of the discharge will invariably be transient relief. And the anger will be saying, "I'll be back."

Most of us know we can get a certain satisfaction or relief when we express aggression. There can be a seductive quality to the anger, and an adrenaline rush, and that's why it can become a habit, even an addiction. Anger is like a fuel.

When we get angry we can feel energized, stronger, bigger—picture an angry cat with a curved spine and raised hair, pretending to be bigger than it is to scare away what it's actually scared of. However, anger isn't a very efficient fuel, because it burns hot and costly. It can be quite polluting on the inside and outside, and it's heavy and corrosive in the system.

Fortunately, there are other options besides the "three doors" of suppression, expression, and unconscious fueling. When insults or obstacles are perceived, it's normal for an anger response to arise. It's just our nature and evolutionary history at work. Though we may succeed in becoming angry less often, it will always be a part of our emotional lives, and it is therefore critical to learn how to relate skillfully with this challenging energy. As soon as you remember that you're not just a victim of your anger, that you can actually use it as a path of self-discovery, you can practice being present with the feeling of anger, connecting with it, and allowing its energy to arise and pass away without acting on it or suppressing it. This is "door number four."

Don't underestimate the power of this simple method. As with mindfulness generally, it's simple, but it's not easy. The capacity to work with anger mindfully is not a binary, either-you-have-it-or-you-don't proposition. It's a practice that builds gradually, strengthening the muscle of mindfulness in the face of pleasant and unpleasant experiences.

Instead of identifying with, rejecting, or being unaware of anger, we can learn to approach it with openness and curiosity, trusting that anger has something to teach us, and that this can be a very productive part of practice.

Anger is not a special problem getting in the way of mindfulness practice. It actually provides you with an exceptional opportunity to practice mindfulness, to open up when habit tells you to shut down, to connect with experience when habit makes you disconnect, and to question if the image you've constructed of yourself and others is as solid as it appears.

The Wolf You Feed

There's a Cherokee story that captures the nature of anger beautifully. A boy tells his grandfather about his anger at a friend who had done him an injustice. His grandfather replies: "Let me tell you a story. I, too, at times, have felt great hate for those who have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do. But hate wears you down and does not hurt your enemy. It's like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. I have struggled with these feelings many times. My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One wolf brings happiness. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. But the other wolf... ah! The littlest thing will send him into a fit of temper. He fights everyone, all of the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. Sometimes it is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, for both of them try to dominate my spirit."

The boy looked intently into his grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which one wins, Grandfather?" The grandfather smiled and quietly said, "The one I feed."

Training in mindfulness is remembering that every moment is an opportunity to practice peace, no matter the circumstances. Our thoughts, words, and actions are food for the wolves we all have inside. There's no need for guilt when you notice you're feeding the angry wolf (we all do this, and guilt won't help). Instead, know that you have the freedom to learn from your experience and keep practicing with patience. Trust that it's the small—often invisible—steps that take you forward. ■

Adapted from The Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance Workbook: an Eight-Week Program for Improved Emotion Regulation and Resilience. *© 2015 by Margaret Cullen and Gonzalo Brito Pons. Reprinted by permission of New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, CA.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHELSEA VICTORIA / STOCKSY UNITED

Instead of identifying with, rejecting, or being unaware of anger, we can learn to approach it with openness and curiosity, trusting that anger has something to teach us.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PIETRO KARRAS / STOCKSY UNITED

Walking with Anger

Sometimes a bit of movement is just what's needed.

1

Find a place where you have room to simply walk back and forth, maybe 20 paces or so. Feel free to go outside.

2

Start walking slowly and attentively, feeling your feet connecting with the ground and your breath gently coming in and out of your body as you walk. Maintaining a stable pace, bring to mind a difficult situation that triggers anger in you, and see if you can allow yourself to really move in close and just feel the anger while keeping a steady rhythm of walking and breathing. For many people, evoking the intention of holding the anger tenderly, as a mother toward her newborn child, allows them to move in close and feel the discomfort of the anger.

Whenever you need to take a break, simply walk and bring your attention fully to the breath, and then return to the practice. Be very gentle with yourself in this exercise, and always remember to work progressively, starting with less intense emotions first.

3

Actually **feel the anger**, not simply observing it from a distance. When held in awareness in this way, see if the anger gives way to another feeling, and perhaps yet another, and just meet those feelings with as much sensitivity and kindness as you can. Allow the feelings to arise and pass, and notice the tendency of the mind to want to solidify the feelings with stories and justifications. If other things call your attention away as you walk, just notice them and escort your attention back to your feelings.

4

Finally, leave a few minutes to simply **walk and breathe** mindfully, feeling your body becoming renewed by each in-breath and releasing any tension from this exercise through each out-breath.

by MARGARET CULLEN
and GONZALO BRITO PONS

Getting to Know Your Anger

In a moment when you **notice** yourself feeling angry and aggressive, turn your attention to the feeling. *Where is it in your body? What is going on?*

Breathe mindfully for a few breaths as you notice your body sensations change. **Listen** for your thoughts without adding to the inner dialogue or trying to silence it. *What are your thoughts saying?*

When you're offended, you're usually holding on to a rigid definition of yourself and what you can accommodate, so **ask** yourself "who" is offended.

It can take some patience to stick with the unpleasant feelings, but remind yourself to come back to observing the anger in this moment with self-compassion and **discover** what it has to teach you.

If you like, you can finish with an aspiration for yourself, something that will also take out some of the self-involvement. You can say to yourself silently, "May I find the resources to understand and **transform** my anger," or "May I take care of the pain I'm feeling and care for the pain in others."

May I take care of the pain I'm feeling and care for the pain in others.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVGENIJ YULKIN / STOCKSY UNITED

TRIGGERS + REACTIONS

COMMON TRIGGERS

What triggers your anger?

List your hottest triggers.

Feeling misunderstood or contradicted in conversation
Being excluded
Lack of control in a situation
Feeling like someone is angry or upset with you
Physical discomfort
Not getting what you want
Disrespect and injustice

COMMON REACTIONS

How do you usually react when you're angry?

List your most common reactions.

Coming up with insults
Interrupting others
Lack of energy and sadness
Avoiding eye contact
Blame/resentment
Constructing narratives about unpleasant experiences
Making sarcastic or passive-aggressive remarks

by MARGARET CULLEN
and GONZALO BRITO PONS

Turn Anger into Love

by SHARON SALZBERG

Anger is uncomfortable—but it's also addictive! In tough situations, anger emerges as a defense mechanism, a tool to help you energize so you can handle whatever catalyzed the feeling. We convince ourselves again and again, whenever we get angry, that the inner fire of anger will help us deal with whatever or whoever injured us. Little do we know that we often injure ourselves even more deeply by allowing the toxicity to take over.

The good news is that we can intervene in moments of anger, as we learn that letting anger control us is often the greatest enemy of all. So the next time you are in a situation that sparks a reaction of anger, try out this practice of self-intervention.

Listen to a guided practice online at mindful.org/guide/emotions

1. **Recognize** your anger as it arises. Suppressing anger just makes the feeling more intense and insurmountable.

2. **Consider** whether there is anything concrete you can do or say to make the situation better (such as leaving the room where a heated conversation took place or taking a walk to cool down).

3. If there's nothing you can do in the moment, keep your attention on the recognition of your anger. The simple gesture of directing your mind to managing the situation with mindfulness prevents you from tunnel vision. **This is an act of self-care.**

4. If it feels impossible to tolerate the discomfort of your anger, **try opening your perspective.** Think of all the things you're grateful for in the moment. This may help you change your perception of the situation at hand.

5. Believe it or not, accepting ourselves—angry as we may be—is an act of compassion, of love. These moments will always come and go again and again. The greatest question, then, to ask is, **how can I alchemize this anger into some act of love?**

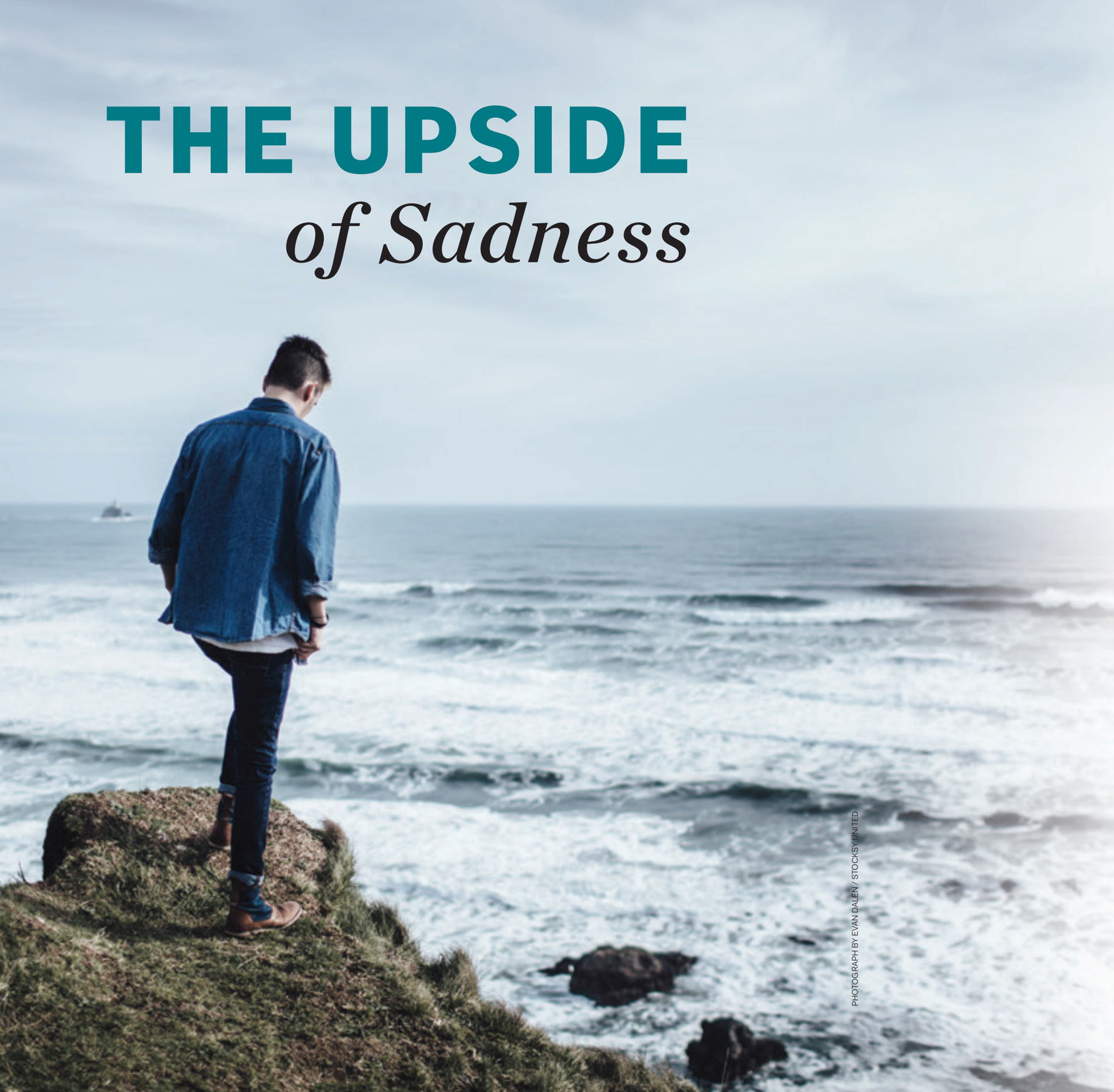
PHOTOGRAPH BY MIQUEL LLONCH / STOCKSY UNITED

sadness

It grounds us, it's painful, and it can seem as deep as an ocean. We sometimes forget that sadness is a natural part of being human. Learning to ride its waves may be difficult but is often the best way forward.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BLUE COLLECTORS / STOCKSY UNITED

THE UPSIDE *of Sadness*



PHOTOGRAPH BY EVAN DALEN / STOCKSY UNITED

It's never fun, but over the course of a lifetime, sadness visits us all. What if instead of resisting, you could welcome it in and listen to what it has to say?

by STEVE HICKMAN

Several years ago, my marriage came to an end. We had been together for 25 years, most of my adult life. On top of all the unpleasant practical matters that you have to deal with during a divorce (custody, money, property, divvying up mementos), I faced a storm of challenging emotions. Indignation and anger were the faces I wore to the outside world (the frustration, fear, and self-righteousness I kept better hidden). These feelings would arise and fall away like the weather, sometimes in great gusts, other times sticking around for days on end, and in patterns I could rarely predict. Yet there was always a steady undercurrent of sadness—over the loss of the dreams for that marriage, and simply for the fact that I had wished, deeply wished, for something else.

My experience and heartache are not unique, and not unique to going through a divorce. Part of being human is to know the weight of sadness. Fleeting or persistent, sharp or dull, threatening to overwhelm or lingering in the background, sadness touches us all:

A loss of love or friendship and the disorienting experience of the landscape shifting beyond your control.

Dropping your child off at daycare for the first time, and the accompanying guilt and realization of time passing far too quickly.

The flimsy pile of greens on your plate making you wonder if you really have what it takes to lose the weight.

A stalled car that strains your finances; one more thing to worry about.

The dirty laundry at the foot of the bed punctuating the loneliness of being single.

When an awareness of the pain and suffering of other beings suddenly strikes you with full force.

At its core, we can say sadness is the emotion that arises when we realize the unfortunate truths of being alive: we lose things, people are flawed, sometimes life is hard, and, eventually, everything ends. And when sadness arrives, we must come to the inevitable conclusion that, "Right now, it's like this."

I should caution that here we are talking about a sad mood and not the unrelenting and persisting disorder

Part of being human is to know the weight of sadness.

of clinical depression. If you experience these feelings consistently over a number of days, notice that you lack energy, have sleep, appetite, or cognitive problems as a result, then you may be suffering from depression and should seek appropriate mental health treatment.

Inescapable though sadness may be, our crafty human brains like to find a way to Houdini out of its bonds, to triumphantly break free. We distract, we avoid, we play the blues to share the common humanity of sadness. We stop ourselves abruptly from crying and too quickly wipe away tears. But what are we resisting, really?

The practice of mindfulness is about being present to every moment, not just the ones that are pleasant or neutral. In fact, going into the darker, more uncomfortable places—the ones we usually try to avoid—may yield powerful insights, and may sharpen our mindfulness and deepen our compassion, both toward ourselves and others.

If truth and insight lives within sadness (the same way they live within joy, satisfaction, and wonder), what would it be like to simply contemplate this truth—to consider meeting yourself in the midst of melancholy and to see what may be there to be learned or discovered? The practice of mindfulness is about being present to every moment, not just the ones that are pleasant or neutral. In fact, going into the darker, more uncomfortable places—the ones we usually try to avoid—may yield powerful insights, and may sharpen our mindfulness and deepen our compassion, both toward ourselves and others. Maybe we could let sadness be our companion long enough to hear what it really has to say.

It Just Is

Loss, disappointment, change—these things that invoke sadness are usually beyond our control. It's just the way the world works. No matter how hard we may try to steel ourselves, they still happen. And just as certainly we feel sad. We're sad because our desire was for things, whatever they are, to be otherwise. Because people, moments, even numbers on a scale, matter to us. Because we cared, we hoped, maybe we even dared to dream.

Sometimes the roots of sadness are found in shame, which can begin a destructive spiral. When something goes badly, it's easy to forget the inevitability of change. But if we're unable to put our experience into some perspective, it's possible for sadness to run amok. "I don't *like* this feeling" becomes "I don't *want* this feeling" becomes "I *shouldn't* have this feeling" becomes "There's something wrong with me because I have this feeling" becomes "I'm bad."

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHIKHAR BHATTARAI / STOCKSY UNITED

PHOTOGRAPH BY HANNAH DEWEY / STOCKSY UNITED

When we live in that distorted world of shame—"I am uniquely bad and flawed and therefore unlovable"—sadness can lead us to isolation, rumination, and depression. So, making the sadness about how uniquely bad we are is not a helpful way to go about things. We are wallowing in sadness, making an occupation out of it.

At the other end of the spectrum, we can deny sadness. "Get over it," we're quick to tell ourselves. "Suck it up, buttercup." It's no big deal. I didn't really care that much anyway. The thing is, though, we know that what we resist, persists. Ever tried to *not* worry? How did that work out? It's possible to bypass our painful feelings, to erect a semi-permanent roadway that goes around, or tunnels under, or rises over, the bad stuff. But this only creates a superficial calm and composure, with a volcanic ulcer developing underneath. Someday it will give way.

When it comes to sadness, as with any emotion that makes us uncomfortable, feel vulnerable, or otherwise imposes itself in our days and lives without our permission, there's a middle way: Letting go of resistance, and without wallowing and indulging in it, simply acknowledging the truth of the situation:

I tried and it still didn't work. It happened and it hurts. I'm disappointed. I'm scared. I'm lonely.

During my divorce, I discovered that when I approached my sadness with tenderness, it actually helped keep me focused. I felt calmer as a result. Sadness was powerfully helpful and effective, in fact, when I let it be there, with less fighting. Sadness was what tempered my anger when I wanted to lash out, to say the hurtful thing or take the action that I couldn't take back. When I could take moments to truly admit that sadness was present for me, it allowed me a pathway back to myself, to the person I truly am and know myself to be: A man who simply wishes to be happy and free from suffering.

Honoring Sadness

The invitation, the mindful approach, is to pause long enough to consider not only the immediacy of the moment of sadness but also how much we valued the thing we lost, the thing we didn't get, or the thing that changed against our will. If we didn't get the job or the promotion, sadness might signal how much we value our contributions to work. Perhaps sadness is reminding us of how much we need warm, supportive friendships when we lose one. When we realize how quickly our children are growing up, sadness informs us how deeply in love we are with these little beings and reflects our own tender hearts that treasure our connections and our responsibilities.

We can learn to have a less painful relationship with sadness. And it begins by befriending these difficult feelings when they arrive.

What if we could comfort ourselves in the same way we would comfort a friend in their place of feeling down?

This isn't simply "looking on the bright side," but instead it is reminding us why we care. If we don't care about something, we aren't really sad when we lose it.

In a similar manner, we can learn to have a less painful relationship with sadness. And it begins by—to whatever degree we're able—befriending these difficult feelings when they arrive. One way to do this is to recognize that we are suffering in these moments and are also worthy of comfort, of soothing, of self-compassion. Most of us are great at taking care of others, but when it comes to us, we deny ourselves that same compassion. What if we were able, when the blues arrive (as they inevitably do in every life), we could comfort ourselves in the same way we would comfort a friend in their place of feeling down? What would we say to them, what might we do, what tone of voice would we use? Could we possibly say, "This is *so* hard and I know it's painful. I'm here for you." Could we make ourselves a cup of tea and simply allow ourselves to be with the sadness that is here? Just like with a friend, we would offer this compassion not to get rid of the pain, but simply because the mood is uncomfortable.

By being kinder to ourselves in times of difficulty, we shift the relationship we have with the suffering from one of avoidance and resistance, to one of acceptance and kindness. By softening our relationship with a feeling that is already here, that then allows us to turn toward it with some degree of curiosity and willingness to see what it's saying to us. To hear our own inner wisdom emerge from the shadows of sadness.

Treating my sadness with gentleness and respect, I could admit that I had loved my wife and had the best of intentions for our union. That in turn allowed me to look myself in the mirror and simply treat myself (and her, on many occasions) with kindness for the hardship of divorce.

When we let go of needing an uncomfortable feeling to go away, we find we can meet it more fully and listen when it says, "this matters to me." This is far from wallowing, ruminating, or generally getting lost in our sadness, taking it personally and making it our own monumental project or cross to bear. It's honoring our unique journey through life: the loves and losses, the hopes and disappointments equally. And really, would we want anything else? In sadness, we can learn to simply appreciate the presence of this little bout of suffering as a reflection of our wholeness and our humanness. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY LÉA JONES / STOCKSY UNITED

PHOTOGRAPH BY SOPHIE MACKENZIE / STOCKSY UNITED

5 Ways Sadness is Good for You

Scientists are learning how sadness works in the brain—and discovering that it can confer important advantages.

Sadness isn't usually valued in our culture. Evolution must have had something else in mind, though, or sadness wouldn't still be with us. Being sad from time to time serves some kind of purpose in helping our species to survive. Yet, while other so-called "negative emotions," like fear, anger, and disgust, seem clearly adaptive—preparing our species for flight, fight, or avoidance, respectively—the evolutionary benefits of sadness have been harder to understand...until recently, that is.

With the advent of fMRI imaging and the proliferation of brain research, scientists have begun to find out more about how sadness works in the brain and influences our thoughts and behavior. Though happiness is still desirable in many situations, there are others in which a mild sad mood offers important advantages.

Here are some of the ways sadness might just be good for you:

1. It can improve your memory
On rainy, unpleasant days that produce a blue mood, people have a much better recollection of details of objects. On bright, sunny days when people feel happy, their memory is far less accurate. It seems positive mood impairs and negative mood improves attention and memory for details in our environment.

2. It improves your judgment
People are more likely to make social misjudgments due to biases when they're happy. But sad moods reduce common judgmental biases, such as attributing intentionality to others' behavior while ignoring situational factors, and assuming that a person having some positive feature—such as a handsome face—is likely to have others, such as kindness or intelligence.

3. It's motivating
Happiness signals to us that we are in a safe, familiar situation, and that little effort is needed to change anything. Sadness, on the other hand, operates like a mild alarm signal, triggering more effort and motivation to deal with a challenge. In other words, a sad mood can increase and happy mood can reduce perseverance with difficult tasks.

4. It might improve your interactions
Sad people are more focused on external cues and don't rely solely on their first impressions to formulate the most appropriate communication strategy in uncertain social circumstances. Happy people, on the other hand, are more inclined to trust their first impressions.

5. It can make you nicer
People in sad moods are more concerned with fairness, and after taking longer to decide, give significantly more to others than do happy people. This suggests that they pay greater attention to the needs of others and are more attentive and thoughtful in making their decisions.

by JOSEPH FORGAS *and* STEVE HICKMAN

Body Scan for Sadness

There is a bit of a cliché that "If you feel it, you can heal it." Thoughts are fast moving, elusive, and hard to pin down. Sensations, though, are different. They are ponderous and slow moving, which means we can target them with our attention and tend to them with kindness and compassion. Locating the arising of sadness in the body (it is different in everyone) gives us a kind of steady place to direct our kind attention and begin to alter our relationship with sadness.

1. **Ask yourself: How does sadness actually feel in my body?** This makes it less of an abstract concept or purely mental event and more of an all-body-and-mind experience.

2. **See if you can locate a place where sadness is most noticeable.** Take your time with it. It might be in your head or face or in your heart; maybe it feels like a weight on your shoulders or an ache in your belly.

3. **Try mentally "breathing" into that location,** touch it warmly with your hand, or simply incline your attention toward it like you would incline toward a sleeping infant.

4. **Let go of the need to make the feeling go away.** Let it be there moment by moment and allow it to do what it does.

by STEVE HICKMAN

Tip

Every so often, when you're really in a rut, allow yourself to take a "sad" day to feel all your emotions. Cancel other plans, listen to music that moves you, look through old photos, curl up on the couch, go for a quiet walk in a park or the woods. At the end, acknowledge that you've taken the time you needed, and remember tomorrow marks a fresh start.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIE DALTON / STOCKSY UNITED

Take a Walk

Another practice that helps to moderate sadness and grief is walking meditation in a natural setting. Find a place, like a woodland trail, where you can walk in nature silently and semi-slowly for 30 to 90 minutes.

Take a friend, agree on the basic route and length of time, and walk quietly. Feel the sensations in your body, take in the sounds and sights, while still keeping a steady pace and looking mainly ahead. Try not to engage anyone else you meet.

When you're finished, do something nice with your friend, and don't dwell too much on the darkness.

Tip

One of the most helpful ways to let sadness be there but counteract the withdrawing tendency, is by realizing that you're not alone in your feelings. Simply contemplate others who have felt sadness, grief, and loss. Think of how your mother felt when her father died or the loss a parent felt when their child moved away. You can also think of the sadness generated by war or oppression. In this way, rather than *my* sadness, it can become *the* sadness.

shame

"Everything I do turns out wrong.
I make a mess of everything. I am no good."
Say hello to shame, the dark emotion that turns a healthy response of making *a mistake into an obsession that says we* are *a mistake. It can be stoked from within, and it can be stoked by messages we receive from others. Mindfulness can shed light on this dark area of the mind, giving us a bit of relief from hurtful self-judgment and creating space for the compassion we all need for simply being human.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY PIXEL STORIES / STOCKSY UNITED

THE DOWNWARD *Spiral of Shame*

You aren't defined by your most shameful moments. Learn how to transform this most paralyzing of emotions.

by PATRICIA ROCKMAN

I'm so ashamed. If you've ever had this thought, you know too well how debilitating shame can be. Waves of self-loathing, wanting to flee and hide; shame is like a nightmare you can't wake up from.

But the truth is, you can't completely avoid shame. It arises unexpectedly and unpredictably over the normal course of living a human life. You will say something thoughtless, act impulsively, or just mess up, as we all do.

When it hits, we feel naked, exposed, our shameful selves out on display for everyone to see. But whatever external critic we fear has nothing on the judge and jury that reside inside of us. Instead of feeling regretful for having done something wrong, through shame's lens, we see ourselves as wrong, bad, even unworthy. Or as researcher and author Brené Brown explains in discussing the difference between shame and guilt: "Guilt is: I'm sorry, I made a mistake. Shame is: I'm sorry, I am a mistake."

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PHOTOGRAPH BY ALINA HVOSTIKOVA / STOCKSY UNITED

We all feel shame at one time or another. We blunder, flub, and barrel our way into situations that we dearly wish we could reverse. And, best-case scenario, the experience is instructive.

A Closer Look at Shame

Shame might be experienced as a heaviness in the chest, a hollow sense of dread, or nausea—the body's way of saying, *Uh-oh, something's wrong here*—followed by an accelerated heart rate, sweating, avoidance of eye contact, or a desire to make yourself small or disappear altogether.

Brain imaging research reveals increased activity in the frontal (concerned with identity) and temporal (clues us in to others' feelings) lobes and limbic system (the seat of emotion) when we experience shame. Other studies suggest that shame can trigger a systemic inflammatory response, something associated with conditions including atherosclerosis, myocardial infarction, stroke, insulin resistance/Type 2 diabetes, and cognitive decline.

There's no question that shame is a full-sensory assault, completely taking over how we feel, think, and act. The question is, why? Why does shame feel so threatening?

Social science indicates that shame's primary adaptive function is to stop us from acting against social norms, making sure we behave appropriately so we don't get ostracized or cast out. This is called social self-preservation, and it makes sense: Survival of the species is dependent upon community; we don't survive long in isolation.

Shame also serves the more personal purpose of helping us recognize when we've gone against our own values, and can provide the jolt we need to set us back on track. Indeed, the reactions associated with shame are so aversive that it's a profound relief when they leave.

Lengths of Shame

We all feel shame at one time or another. We blunder, flub, and barrel our way into situations that we dearly wish we could reverse. And, best-case scenario, the experience is instructive. As awful as it feels, we learn something—about how to (or not to) act, who to trust, or even about how to come out the other side of a shameful event kinder, wiser, more careful of others' feelings, or better prepared to protect ourselves from harm.

The problem comes when instead of moving past shame, you stay stuck in it. We see this in cases of emotional abuse, for example, when people are regularly shamed and sent messages they're "no good." They can come to see themselves as so deeply flawed and unlovable that shame becomes a part of their identity. They internalize the shame and may even doubt their right to exist. As psychologist and creator of Emotion-Focused Therapy Les Greenberg says, "If you're treated like garbage, you come to believe you're garbage."

It's not surprising that people with a strong and fixed shame identity often suffer from depression or anxiety. Chronic shame can also lead to eating disorders, addiction, self-denigration, and even self-harm.

Eventually those living under the perpetual cloud of shame shut down, isolate, or lash out in anger. This makes interacting with others difficult and can keep healthy relationships, just the thing that can help heal the wounds of shame, at bay.

When we can view our shame with curiosity and kindness instead of self-blame, its power is lessened.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KELLY KNOX / STOCKSY UNITED

Being with It

It doesn't have to be this way. Sure, whatever the extent that shame plays in our lives, from a "normal" incident to something more extreme, one thing is certain: It's hard to face. And our impulse is to escape—physically, mentally, or emotionally. Tuning out, deflecting blame, pretending to shrug it off while burying the shame deep inside, or turning to some other means to defuse uncomfortable emotions are just some of the ways we attempt to dodge shame.

And these things work, in the short term. They offer immediate relief from the hot, sickening sensation of self-loathing overwhelming us in the moment. But in the long run, relying on avoidance tactics to deal with difficult feelings only means that we don't learn what we can tolerate, come through, or manage in healthier ways.

When it comes to shame "we have to feel it to heal it," as Greenberg says. Bringing your attention to the softer feelings of sadness and need that accompany shame is a gentle way to find your way through.

We know that turning toward difficulty and accepting who we are, warts and all, are essential aspects of mindfulness. But it is not simply turning toward difficulty in a benign way. When we are sick with shame, we need to bring compassion to ourselves. And this may be the ultimate antidote to this most difficult of emotions.

When we can view our shame with curiosity and kindness instead of self-blame, its power is lessened.

The truth is that the human experience is messy and rich; the ecstatic, joyful, sad, and, yes, even shameful events have their place. Shame has been called "the swampland of the soul." Why not, as Brené Brown suggests, "walk in and find your way around"? ■

Take the Sting Out of Shame

Being curious about this uncomfortable feeling can loosen its power over you.

Becoming familiar with a difficult emotion means getting interested and curious about it. Take it slow, uncovering new "territory" a bit at a time instead of trying to get to know it all at once. As you do, you learn that you can sit with uncomfortable feelings, and that they will eventually pass. Over time, you develop resilience, self-knowledge, and trust in yourself—the best antidotes to the self-judgment that shame inspires.

Whether you're experiencing feelings of shame right now or have buried shame that you've been avoiding, are you willing to get to know it a bit better? Remember, thoughts and feelings are larger and scarier when they're left unexplored and kept in the shadows.

1 Take a comfortable meditation posture, and begin by bringing attention to your breathing. Gently bring the experience or memory you feel ashamed of to mind. Without needing to change anything, observe and take note of what thoughts, emotions, and sensations come up.

2 Name them as they arise. *Fear. Anxiousness. Guilt. Hot. Clenching. Don't look.* If the sensations are strong, breathe into them, feeling them soften and expand as you do. As best you can, bring kindness and compassion to this moment of difficulty. Remind yourself that you are safe. Remember, if you feel overwhelmed you can let go of the practice at any time, coming back to it when you feel more able.

3 Stay with this allowing, labeling, and breathing into the sensations that are present for as long as they hold your attention, then shift your awareness and bring a kind of spaciousness to the entire body.

4 In this more expansive state, ask yourself:
Can I let this be as it is? (It's already here, after all.)
Can I let it go? (It already happened.)
Does it need addressing?
Do I have to take an action? If so, what?
Can I shift my attitude, bringing a different perspective to this experience?

by PATRICIA ROCKMAN

Listen to a guided version of this practice online at mindful.org/guide/emotions

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIQUEL LLONCH / STOCKSY UNITED

DAILY DOSES OF SELF-COMPASSION

A good way to ease self-criticism is to mix compassion into your daily mindfulness practice at just the moment when judgments overtake you. Compassion grows as you turn toward parts of your mind that you usually try to ignore or dispel—parts of yourself that may surprisingly become all the more vivid and troublesome when you are meditating.

by STEVE FLOWERS

Try this:

When you notice a feeling of sadness or fear or an old self-judgment arising, stop. Take a breath. Offer yourself one of the following phrases. Then return to the breath. Repeat often.

I care for this frightened and lonely heart.
May I be free from fear and suffering.
May I be at peace and know ease of being.
May I be happy in this life right now, just as it is.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAJA TOPCAGIC / STOCKSY UNITED

Breathing Through the Harsh Judgments

This common mindfulness practice is a powerful and convenient way to undermine negative mind-chatter that causes us undue pain. And it can be done anywhere, anytime.

1. Take a seat where you are right now, in a posture that feels comfortable, wakeful, and alert.

2. Bring attention to your breathing at your belly and notice the breath coming and going. If you like, place your hand there to feel the rise and fall. Make this rising and falling the center of your attention and let the breath come and go as it will, in its own way and at its own pace. It knows how to "breathe you," and you can let it do what it does without trying to change it in any way. If your mind wanders, simply return to feeling the belly's movement, using the sensation as your way to be present, here and now in each successive moment for at least the next five minutes.

3. You will soon notice that the mind is not all that interested in following the breath. You have to bring it back again and again. Take notice of the judgments arising: *I can't do this. This is stupid. I'll never be able to meditate.* No need to enter into a conversation with them; just return to the sensation of the breath. By simply noticing the judgment you can quickly see through it—it's just a fleeting thought.

   This is how you gradually, breath by breath, undermine the power of harsh judgment: "Just another judgment; back to the breath." It works with any kind of self-judgment. Simply notice and with as much kindness as possible, begin again.

resilience

Resilience, grit, coping skills. Whatever you call it, your capacity to recover from hardship has a big influence on your overall happiness and ability to thrive throughout life. The good news is that resilience can be strengthened—and mindfulness is one of the best ways to do it.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAVIER PARDINA / STOCKSY UNITED

3 Ways to Get Better at Dealing With Change

When things are at their worst, we have the chance to be at our best. It just takes a quick mental shift. That's the essence of resilience.

by LINDA GRAHAM

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER WEY / STOCKSY UNITED

When I worked in the Sunset neighborhood of San Francisco, I would park my car in Golden Gate Park and walk the two blocks to my office, something I could easily do on automatic pilot. One day, more distracted than usual by mulling over something I was worried about, I wasn't paying enough attention to where I was walking and blithely stepped into a sidewalk of freshly laid wet cement—up to my ankles.

The cascade of critical thoughts erupted immediately. You stupid klutz! Look what you've done! You've ruined your shoes! Now you'll be late to work. You'll have to cancel clients today. You'll probably lose clients over this. How could you! An instant slide into a deep rabbit hole of shaming-blaming-catastrophizing.

Fortunately, by then I had enough mindfulness and self-compassion practices under my belt to catch up to myself. "Whoa! Wait a minute! I need to do this differently! I'm not the only person on the planet who made a mistake today just because they weren't paying attention. This is probably not the only mistake I'm going to make today. I need to slow down, collect myself, try to be a little kinder to myself right here, right now. I need to step out of this sidewalk, and deal."

With that shift in attitude and shift in response, I gently picked my feet up out of my shoes and picked my shoes up out of the cement.

There happened to be an apartment building with an outdoor water faucet just a few steps away. As I washed off my shoes, I began to think a little more clearly. "This happened. Other than my own embarrassment and my own inner critic wailing the hide out of me, there's no catastrophe here. Shit happens. I'm dealing with it as best as I can. This is going to be OK."

When an on-site construction worker came over to me with some paper towels to wipe off my shoes (I'm grateful to this day for his kindness—no teasing or taunting, no further embarrassment), I began to have some hope that I could save my shoes. I also began to have a little pride and a lot of gratitude that I was coping as well as I was.

Then came the big shift. Yeah, shit happens, but shift happens, too. If I can shift my attitude in this moment, I can shift my attitude in any moment.

Bouncing back from disappointment, difficulty, even disaster, simply means using the response flexibility innate in our brains to shift gears, shift perspectives, see options that we couldn't see before. Response flexibility allows us to shift out of our very automatic, habitual, and quick reactivity into a more skillful responsiveness. By shifting our response, we become more resilient; we learn and grow; we recover our well-being.

We strengthen our capacity to create a shift in our responses to challenging life events, even potential crises, by mindfully, compassionately paying attention to our reactivity.

1. Watch Your Reactivity

I was working in my office one day, seeing the individuals and couples I counsel in my psychotherapy practice. On a long break, I was sitting there, quietly meditating, but I had left the ringer of my phone on because I was expecting a phone call with the results of my most recent mammogram. When the call came with the results—"There's a slight abnormality on the X-ray. Could you come in and have the mammogram done again?"—my anxiety went right through the roof. Thoughts immediately sprang to mind of two friends who'd recently had surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy for their breast cancer.

Because I had been meditating just the moment before, I had enough calm and clarity to watch my anxiety soar, to watch those thoughts rapidly spill over each other. I could see my reactivity. I could see my reactivity to my reactivity. My hand went to my heart immediately. I even said to the nurse on the phone, "I'm breathing. I'm breathing." Then I scheduled the second appointment and sat back down to meditate again.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STUDIO FIRMA / STOCKSY UNITED

A shift happens when we intentionally choose to focus our awareness on the experience of compassion, gratitude, warmth, and other feelings that put us in touch with our natural resilience.

Mindful self-compassion shifts the possibilities of our responses instantly, in this moment, in any moment, and over time in every moment. Being kinder to ourselves becomes natural and effortless.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNINSTUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED

Being compassionate to myself as the experiencer of the fear, opening out to my connection to others, my common humanity, I thought, I'm not alone. I'm not the only one. I also appreciated the resources I would need medically and emotionally and that I would be able to access. Appreciating these resources and connections counteracts the tendency to see oneself as a lone victim of circumstances.

The results of the second mammogram later were fine. My practice allowed me to return to a sense of presence and equanimity even before I knew those results, and had they been worse, I would have been in a better position to deal with that.

2. Be Kind to Yourself

Last winter a huge thunderstorm blew out the power transformer on my block—no electricity for 36 hours—no heat, no lights, no refrigerator, no stove, no phones, no internet.

I managed to handle things fairly well, staying calm and creative in my coping, until the morning of the second day when I automatically wanted to check email. I was aware of my rising frustration and my deepening contraction around the frustration. I was losing my clarity, becoming more reactive and angry when I walked through the kitchen and noticed a magnet on my refrigerator with the words: "May I give myself the compassion I need."

Right. I teach this stuff.

So I stopped in front of the refrigerator and began reciting the mindful self-compassion phrases I teach to many others. By the time I had repeated those phrases a few times, slowly, thoughtfully, I could feel my mind expanding back from its contraction to a more open perspective. (You can feel this physically in your body—shifting from tightness and tension to openness and relaxation.)

I have internet at my office! That's only 10 minutes away.

When I was in my contracted, frustrated state of mind, I couldn't think straight. Repeating the mindful self-compassion phrases to myself broke the automaticity of my reactivity and allowed me to see the larger picture again.

It's not that mindful self-compassion solves the problems of the moment. It doesn't. Self-compassion and other positive emotion practices—gratitude, awe, generosity, joy, delight, serenity, love—simply shift the functioning of the brain to put us in a better position to solve the problem.

Shift happens when we intentionally choose to focus our awareness on the experience of compassion, gratitude, warmth, and other feelings that put us in touch with our natural resilience. These practices can shift the functioning of the brain instantly. Over time, these practices become steadily more reliable, the new "go to" when we are navigating the twists and turns of life. Mindful self-compassion shifts the possibilities of our responses instantly, in this moment, in any moment, and over time in every moment. Being kinder to ourselves becomes natural and effortless.

3. See Clearly

Mindful self-compassion practices allow us to be kind and caring to ourselves in the moment of any reaction to any event in any relationship, recovering our equilibrium and openness to the moment, allowing us to see our reactions clearly and make wise and resilient choices about how we relate to ourselves and to others.

Practices of mindfulness and self-compassion together allow us to make the wisest choices possible. We can shift our patterns of response to difficult, even adverse, life events, from confusion and reactivity to intentional openness and reliable clarity. Yes, shit happens—but shift happens, too. In this moment. In any moment. In every moment. ■

Hand on Heart

This practice can help you respond skillfully to distressing events. You can do it quickly, many times a day if need be, to bring a calming awareness to your experiences.

Simply stop, pause, and:

1. Place your hand over your heart so that you feel the warm touch of your hand on your chest.

2. Begin to breathe more slowly, more gently, more deeply, into your heart center.

3. Recall a moment, just one moment, when you felt safe, loved, and cherished by another human being. (With practice, evoking this memory can happen instantly, too.) Not the entire relationship, just one moment. This could be a moment with a spouse or a parent or a child. It could be a moment with a friend, a therapist, a teacher, or even a beloved pet.

4. As you remember this moment, let its warmth wash through your body; savor this feeling for 30 seconds.

5. When you are ready, reflect on any shift you felt in your body from this practice.

PHOTOGRAPH BY VISUALSPECTRUM / STOCKSY UNITED

Find Your Power

Knowing what makes you feel centered and confident is the first step to regaining your balance when life knocks you down.

by CARLEY HAUCK

A few years ago I was dating a man for several months that I loved deeply and had aspirations of a long-term future with. We came to a crossroads in our communication one challenging day, and he shut down and was not willing or able to have a conscious conversation to repair, resolve, and understand one another. He was in my life, we were about to move in together, and the next moment, it was here-is-your-stuff gone. It was one of the most difficult experiences I've gone through, and believe me, I have had several in this lifetime and expect to have more.

Yet his leaving didn't break me. I felt devastated at first, and didn't quite know how to surf this new and unexpected change. I was moving through the stages of grief and loss (denial, anger, bargaining, deep sadness, and acceptance). Then, after about two months of daily tears and uncertainty, something shifted within me. I was practicing intense self-love, claiming my worth and my life in a way that I had never done before. It was as if my "inner superhero" kicked in. When I was able to tap into my innate strength and wisdom, I felt empowered, loveable, and resilient —and that I could do and be anything that I put time and attention to.

The two universal laws of impermanence are uncertainty and unpredictability. When life changes unexpectedly (as it will at some point for all of us), it can leave you feeling off balance, insecure, and unclear of what really matters or what to do next. These feelings are natural and part of the human experience.

Regaining your equilibrium is an exercise in resilience. But how do you get back to that when you've been laid flat? By consciously engaging in the activities, thoughts, and actions that make you feel grounded, confident, in your own power. Cultivating this skill before you need it will just make it that much easier to draw upon it when you do.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNINSTUDIO / STOCKSY UNITED

WHAT EMPOWERS YOU?

We've all had experiences where we don't assert or claim what we authentically feel, want, and need. Sometimes we work against our own best interests by engaging in behaviors or patterns that don't support us and leave us feeling depleted. If you want to show up as your best, most confident self, knowing and actively cultivating the thoughts and actions that support this state is essential.

1 **Think about actions in your life that lead you to feel off-balance, ineffective, and/or where you haven't shown up as your most authentic and confident self. Things like:**

When I'm moving too fast.
When I'm overtired.
When I say yes when I really mean no, or not yet.
When I don't listen to my feelings and needs.
When I don't share my feelings or tell others what I need.
When I don't stick up for myself.
When I isolate or don't spend enough time with people I love.
When I don't exercise, meditate, or eat well.
When I listen to the critical and judgmental thoughts in my head about my worth, potential, and abilities.

2 **Now think about behaviors that support you to feel at your best—empowered, confident, and balanced.**

When I slow down.
When I get a good night's sleep.
When I'm around people who love and accept me.
When I'm in nature.
When I regularly exercise, meditate, and eat healthfully.
When I listen to myself and support my feelings and needs.
When I feel on purpose in my life.
When I'm creating something that matters to me.
When I'm helping others.
When I feel engaged in a community or group with a shared goal or intention.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY KATE DAIGNEAULT / STOCKSY UNITED

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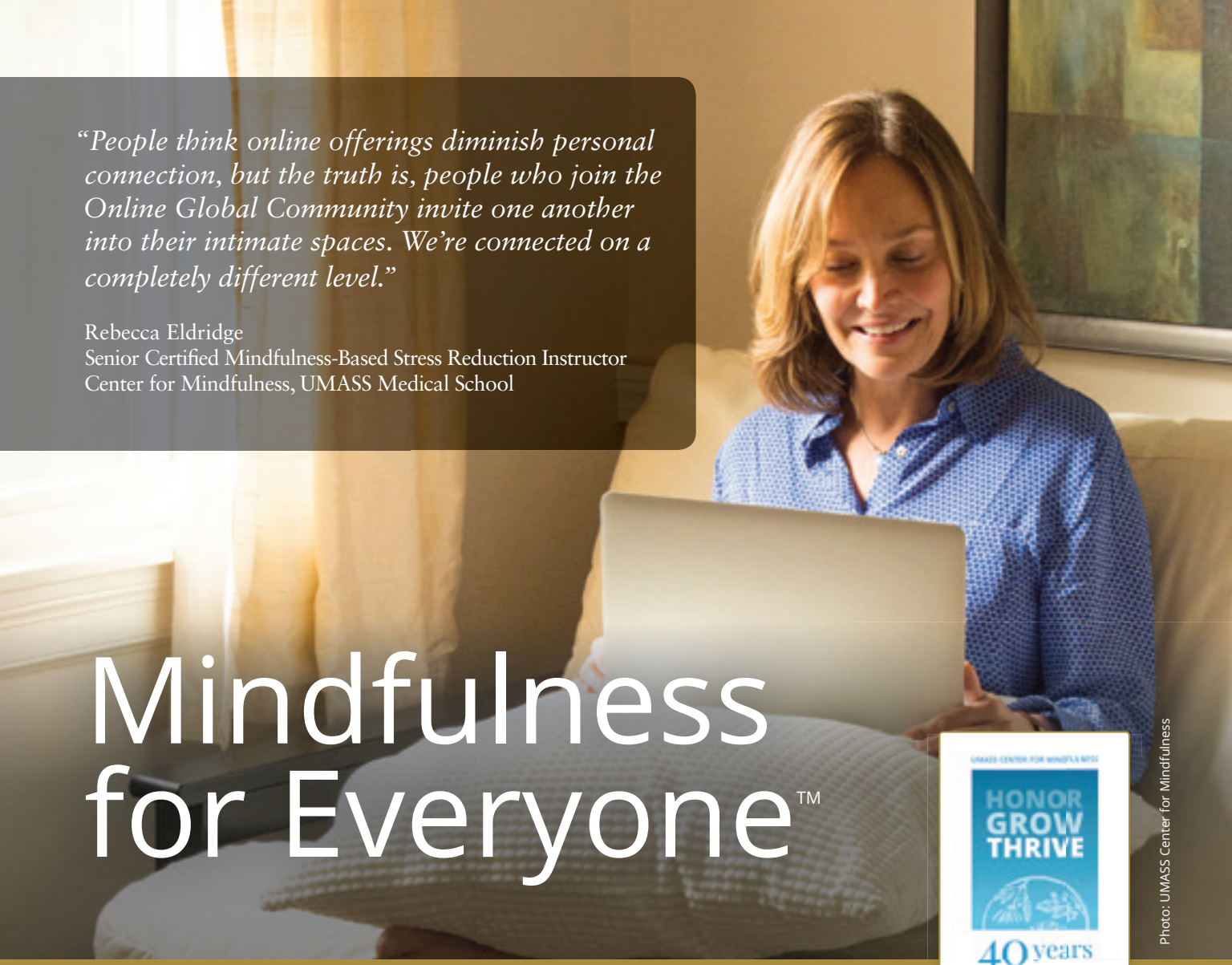
The best way out is always through.
—from "A Servant to Servants," by Robert Frost
PHOTOGRAPH BY AARON THOMAS / STOCKSY UNITED



"People think online offerings diminish personal connection, but the truth is, people who join the Online Global Community invite one another into their intimate spaces. We're connected on a completely different level."

Rebecca Eldridge
Senior Certified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Instructor
Center for Mindfulness, UMASS Medical School

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Photo: UMASS Center for Mindfulness

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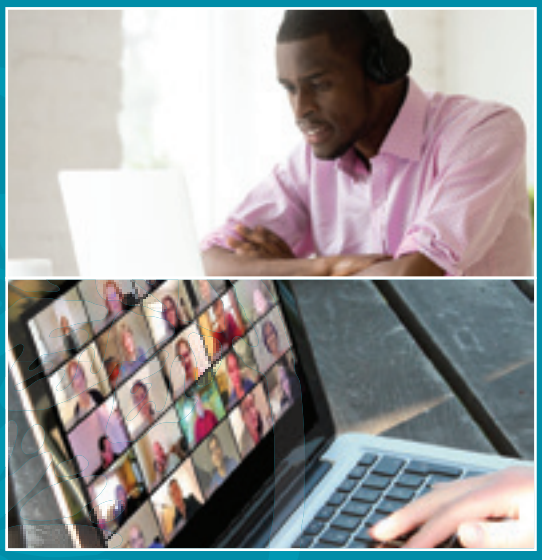
The Online Global Community provides support to MBSR and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) graduates, as well as anyone interested in mindfulness—no matter where in the world they are. Participants in this community:

- Live and work in cities and countries around the world
- Come from a wide range of backgrounds and belief systems
- Want more peace and authentic connection in their lives and the world

Join our Online Global Community each week to connect, learn, and practice mindfulness together.



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