

# THE PRACTICE®

## A Toolkit for Mindfulness and Stress Relief

Practical strategies such as goal setting and time-management techniques can help you more successfully manage the everyday stressors of a busy life. When you set priorities and take positive actions toward your goals, your daily activities will become more manageable, which will naturally help you to feel calmer. Although success in any endeavor is more likely when you take all the necessary steps, the outcomes in life (what happens around you and to you) are never guaranteed.

We cannot control the outside world; nor can we change the past or predict the future. However, the human mind has a way of convincing us that these things are possible. Although circumstances may seem to be the cause of our everyday stress, it is usually the mind and its interpretation of events that cause the stress-related emotions. Therefore, in addition to practical approaches for dealing with the outside world to reduce your stress levels, you can also develop strategies for creating a calm inner world that cannot as easily be shaken by external events. This can be accomplished by committing to a daily mindfulness practice.

### What's in Your Mind?

The mind's job is to think. Your job is to know what your mind is telling you so that you can decide where to place your mental energy. The first step in gaining this awareness is becoming familiar with what your mind generally focuses on.

### DEVELOPING MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is the practice of maintaining complete awareness of one's experiences on a moment-to-moment basis. When we are being mindful, we are fully present in the moment. This gives us the ability to respond to situations, as well as to our thoughts and emotions, with full awareness. It is in the moment that we have the opportunity to make the choices that will affect our future. For example, when approached mindfully, a sabotaging thought that might provoke anxiety, such as "I don't think I can get all this studying done before tomorrow's exam" can be put in perspective before stress levels rise. With mindful attention, the thought can be rephrased: "There is a lot of material here to cover. I'll do my best to start reviewing now to get through it before the exam." In this way, a potential sense of panic is replaced by confidence in oneself to do his/her best.

## YOUR TURN

### Discuss

Think of two hypothetical scenarios in which a mindful approach to a situation would more likely lead to success. What would happen in these same situations if they were approached carelessly and without complete attention? Come to class prepared to share your thoughts.

This is just one example of how mindfulness can help you start to gain control of the thoughts in your mind and steer them in a direction that is more beneficial for achieving your goals.

## DAILY PRACTICE

As with practical strategies for managing stress, approaching your life with a mindful attitude takes consistent practice. The Practice® is a daily toolkit you can use to cultivate a calmer and more mindful perspective that strengthens your ability to approach all facets of life with increased understanding and competency. This toolkit has three parts:

1. **Sitting in silence in the morning**
2. **Practicing focused attention during the day**
3. **Letting go through reflection at night**

1. **Sitting in Silence.** Before you check in to your social network and begin your routine for the day, first check in with yourself for a few minutes. Sit quietly in a place where you are less likely to be disturbed and set a gentle alarm for 5 minutes. Close your eyes. Start by taking a few deep breaths until you feel your body begin to relax. Then just breathe naturally, paying attention to your breath as you inhale and exhale. Notice the following:

- physical sensations you are feeling
- emotions you are experiencing
- thoughts that are coming to the surface

## YOUR TURN

### Practice and Reflect

Set your alarm for 5 minutes earlier this week. Each morning, before you begin your day, follow the instructions in this section. At the end of your session, rate your experiences in the 30-Day Meditation Challenge worksheet on page 3. Also notice if you feel calmer and more mindful during your daily activities.

Simply notice how you respond to these prompts without engaging them. For example, if your mind tells you to get up and go, do not respond to it. If you feel sad, do not try to convince yourself to feel differently. If your body aches in a certain position, gently adjust your posture without getting up.

Once you have checked in with yourself, take a few more deep breaths. Then, allow your breathing to return to normal, placing your full attention on your inhalations and exhalations. Do this until the timer signals the end of the session.

You will notice that your mind (and possibly your emotions) will go in many different directions during this exercise. This response to silent time is perfectly normal. The only thing you must do when this happens is return your attention to your breath.

*“We talk about being in the moment and increasing chaos throughout practice, so when I go into the game, everything is relaxed.”*

—Russell Wilson, Quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks

## 30-DAY MEDITATION CHALLENGE

*On a scale from 1 to 5 rate your sensations and emotions (1 = not present, 5 = present)*

Day	Time (Minutes)	Distracted	Tired	Annoyed	Emotional	Peaceful
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
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26						
27						
28						
29						
30						

**2. Practicing Focused Attention.** This activity strengthens your ability to be present in the moment. While multitasking is an important skill, it is more important to be able to skillfully focus on just one task. Preparing for a test is a good example. Would you send messages, listen to music, and watch a video while you are studying? This type of behavior is unlikely to produce your best work.

Now, suppose you are indeed placing all your attention on the review material, but your mind begins to wander. After a few minutes, you suddenly realize that you have been daydreaming about the future or ruminating about the past. How do you rein in your thoughts so that you can refocus your attention on your studies?

### YOUR TURN

#### Practice and Reflect

Select one activity from your daily routine that requires your undivided attention. Focus your attention entirely on that task. When your mind begins to wander, use your Focus Phrase to refocus your attention. Notice what happens. Reflect on your experiences in a journal entry.

A Focus Phrase, an uplifting word or short phrase you have chosen for your use in The Practice, can help bring your awareness back to the present. You use your Focus Phrase by silently repeating the words to yourself several times until you feel refocused.

Repeating the phrase is like pushing a pause button on your mind. The repetition intercepts or slows down the distracting thoughts, increasing your level of mindfulness and redirecting your stream of consciousness toward a more beneficial and calmer space. A Focus Phrase can also be used when you feel stressed, worried, or unmotivated. In fact, the opportunities to use your Focus Phrase are not limited by guidelines, so experiment with it in all types of situations and for gaining clarity on your full range of emotions.

Below are a few examples of a Focus Phrase. Use one of these examples or create your own. The words or phrase you choose should feel uplifting and positive. Once you have chosen a phrase, use the same one consistently so that repeating it feels increasingly more familiar and natural as time passes.

*Peace.*

*I am strong.*

*All is well.*

*I am enough.*

*This will pass.*

*Just be.*

*Be still and trust.*

*I trust myself.*

*I love myself.*

*I trust the process of life.*

*I am calm and confident.*

*I approve of who I am.*

### Reading for Inspiration

Reading for inspiration is a mind-enriching activity that can widen your perspective and support your mindfulness practice. Spend some time carefully choosing a nonfiction book from the library, an article from the Internet, or a magazine that you feel will be particularly inspirational or motivational. Identify a paragraph in the book or article that feels significant

and meaningful to you. Copy the paragraph into your journal. Reflect on what you feel the author is conveying and how you can apply that message to your life. Prepare a short paper discussing your insights.

> A suggested reading list, including books and excerpts, is available for this activity on page 6 of this PDF.

3. **Letting go through reflection at night.** Reflection is the process of reviewing your day and setting an intention to let go of everything that has happened, regardless of whether you perceived it as a negative, positive, or neutral event. This process of letting go increases your ability to sleep more soundly and wake up in the morning with a fresh perspective.

There is nothing specific you need to do to prepare for reflection other than get into bed, take a few deep breaths, and relax. Repeat your Focus Phrase a few times to help you put your focused attention entirely on the activity. Then, briefly mentally review your day from beginning to end. Spend no more than 5 minutes on this process.

Your mind may ask questions such as *Why did I do that? Why did I say that? What was I thinking?* However, there is nothing you can do to change what has already occurred, so let the questions pass without answering them. The likelihood is that you will have another opportunity to respond differently in a similar situation, if that is what you determine is in your best interest.

Naturally, if it has been a stressful day, upsetting memories may quickly arise. Similarly, if it has been a very good day, you may want to keep replaying the positive events. In either case, the purpose of this time is to acknowledge each event and accept it for the lessons you learned—without judgment, longing, or regrets. Thoughts of this nature can interfere with your ability to be mindful the next day in your daily interactions, so allow the memories of your experiences to pass without further engagement.

When you have completed your brief mental review of the day, repeat your Focus Phrase a few times and then go to sleep.

### YOUR TURN

#### Practice and Reflect

Spend 5 minutes reviewing your day each night for a week. Are you able to let go of both the positive and negative aspects of your day? What can help you to further strengthen this ability? Which events are easiest to release? Reflect on your experiences in a journal entry.

“Outer peace begins with inner peace.”

Barb Schmidt  
Meditation Teacher  
and Mindfulness Activist

South Florida resident Barb Schmidt is an international speaker, spiritual mentor, philanthropist, businesswoman, and author of the international best-selling book *The Practice: Simple Tools for Managing Stress, Finding Inner Peace, and Uncovering Happiness*. With mentors such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Marianne Williamson, and Deepak Chopra, among many others, Barb has devoted more than 30 years to her spiritual studies and teaching. She founded the non-profit Peaceful Mind Peaceful Life to support programs, speakers, and teachers that are dedicated to helping individuals cultivate peace and compassion in their lives, individually and collectively. Barb writes biweekly blog posts available on her website [www.barbschmidt.com](http://www.barbschmidt.com). Stay in touch with Barb through [twitter .com/peacefulbarb](https://twitter.com/peacefulbarb), [facebook.com/peacefulbarb](https://facebook.com/peacefulbarb), [facebook.com/barbschmidt](https://facebook.com/barbschmidt), and [instagram/peaceful\\_barb](https://instagram/peaceful_barb).



Barb Schmidt ▲

## RECOMMENDED READING

*The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho

*The Gift of Change* by Marianne Williamson

*Inner and Outer Peace Through Meditation*  
by Rajinder Singh

*Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke

*Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl

*May Cause Miracles* by Gabrielle Bernstein

*Practicing the Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle

*Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu

*The Voice of Knowledge: A Practical Guide to Inner Peace*  
by Don Miguel Ruiz

*Way of the Peaceful Warrior: A Book That Changes Lives*  
by Dan Millman

*When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chödrön

## RECOMMENDED EXCERPTS

***When Things Fall Apart***, Pema Chödrön

"In order to feel compassion for other people, we have to feel compassion for ourselves. In particular, to care about people who are fearful, angry, jealous, overpowered by addictions of all kinds, arrogant, proud, miserly, selfish, mean, you name it—to have compassion and to care for these people means not to run from the pain of finding these things in ourselves. In fact, our whole attitude toward pain can change. Instead of fending it off and hiding from it, we could open our hearts and allow ourselves to feel that pain, feel it as something that will soften and purify us and make us far more loving and kind."

*When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chödrön. Shambhala, 2000.

***The Gift of Change***, Marianne Williamson

"Things are changing quickly in the world, and there's no sense we are headed in a more serene direction anytime soon. Getting on top of things at this time has less to do with mastering particular skills or gaining specific knowledge than with mastering our own ability to find serenity and quiet in the midst of raging storms. Otherwise, we'll be thrown off our game with every drama that the world has to offer."

*The Gift of Change* by Marianne Williamson. HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

***Inner and Outer Peace Through Meditation***, Rajinder Singh

"In the last few years people have turned to meditation as a solution to the emotional and mental strains of life. Meditation has numerous benefits for our physical and mental well-being. . . . By reducing stress we also have a positive effect on those around us. If we are in a state of bliss from our meditation, we take life more calmly. We do not react to others as much. We are better able to listen to their words in a more detached, even manner. Thus, we become more peaceful and nonviolent."

*Inner and Outer Peace Through Meditation* by Rajinder Singh. Radiance Publishers, 2013.

***Into the Heart of Life***, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

"Life is unsatisfactory because it is always changing. It doesn't have this solid core which we always hope to grasp. We want security, and we believe that our happiness lies in being secure. And so we try to make things permanent. We get houses which seem very permanent and we furnish them. We get ourselves into relationships which we hope will last forever. We have children and hope they may also consolidate this idea of an identity, something which will be constant. We have children, and we love our children, so our children will love us, and this will carry on for a long, long time all through our lives. Our children are our security."

*Into the Heart of Life* by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. Snow Lion Publications, 2011, p. 2.

***Practicing the Power of Now***, Eckhart Tolle

“Are you always trying to get somewhere other than where you are? Is most of your doing just a means to an end? Is fulfillment always just around the corner or confined to short-lived pleasures, such as sex, food, drink, drugs, or thrills and excitement? Are you always focused on becoming, achieving, and attaining, or alternatively chasing some new thrill or pleasure? Do you believe that if you acquire more things you will become more fulfilled, good enough, or psychologically complete? Are you waiting for a man or woman to give meaning to your life?”

*Practicing the Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle. New World Library, 1999, p. 37.