

MINDFUL
compassionate
PARENTING

A red scribble graphic consisting of several overlapping, curved lines, resembling a heart or a stylized flame, positioned above the word 'compassionate'.

Practical Handbook for Parents

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www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org



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Sources

The content of this handbook is closely connected with the course "Mindful Compassionate Parenting". All the content in the handbook derives from this course. The source for the course is the book by Jörg Mangold who is also the author of the curriculum of the Mindful Compassionate Parenting course.



NOTE: Jörg Mangold's book for parents is at this point published only in German language. Publishing in English and other European languages is pending.

Special courtesy to Lorraine Hobbs, M.A., Founder/Director Family Education Programs UCSD, Certified MBI Teacher, Teacher Trainer, MBSR Mentor, Co-Founder: Mindful Self-Compassion for Teens, Self-Compassion for Parents, A Friend in Me - Self-Compassion for Kids and their Caregivers. Jörg has worked together with Lorraine on developing formats and curricula for parents in supporting Mindfulness and Self-Compassion. Lorraine contributed especially to the translation of exercises and meditations used in teaching MCP-courses together at UCSD.

Some of the meditations and exercises proposed in this handbook are adaptations from activities developed for other curriculums such as MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction), MSC (Mindful Self-Compassion), MBCL (Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living), PNT (Positive Neuroplasticity Training) or the MP (Mindful Parenting) course by Susan Bögels. Whenever this is the case it is mentioned in the Handbook.

This handbook can be downloaded always
in its actual version from the website:
www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org

Structure of the handbook & How to use it best

The handbook is structured along the build-up of the 10-weeks MCP course for parents. It is made to be able to use and benefit from it without attending the course and to get an idea, what a MCP course is all about.

The experience of common humanity, the sharing of experiences from exercises and meditations and from applying in everyday family life is something only the live course can give you. You will find live online MCP courses on the website www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org and links to courses in other Languages as well.



Each week-module has 5 parts:



Background Reading

We invite you to start each new week on the programme with the background reading. This serves mainly as an introduction to the theme of the week and will help to better understand the exercises and practices proposed.



Parenting

Specific exercises and tools are offered to assist you in getting in touch with your parenting role in everyday life. Observe, reflect and use practices to improve your presence, emotional regulation and relationship in your family. A daily journal on a specific topic will support this process each week.



Daily journal

Most weeks you will be invited to carry out observation and reflection exercises around a parenting theme. In the daily journal you will find a little form with some guiding questions that shall support you to document your observations and reflections.



Informal Practice

This is where you are guided in integrating what you are learning in practice into your daily life and schedule. Try to apply the mode of mindfulness and self-compassion in everyday life situations. This can result in better awareness and consciousness assisting you to take perspective of really looking at what comes up as thoughts, sensations and emotions. As a result, for example with informal mindfulness practice you will gain a stronger sense for being present in the moment by moment experience. See, feel, taste and smell in an enhanced way. Develop a better emotional regulation and become able to discover triggers for stress reactions ahead of time. It will help you to listen mindfully and to be more friendly with yourself as well as cultivating positive experiences.



Meditations

Longer exercises and meditations are presented to establish the mode of mindfulness and self-compassion and to build up inner resources.

We know that time is scarce as a parent. The more often you can give yourself these formal gifts of mindfulness and self-compassion practice the more it will be training these “muscles” and the easier it will be to use them in demanding times. You will find audio files for these formal practices. We often give short forms of formal practices as well for times, when it just does not work to do the longer formal practices.

All audios to the meditations can be found on our website:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

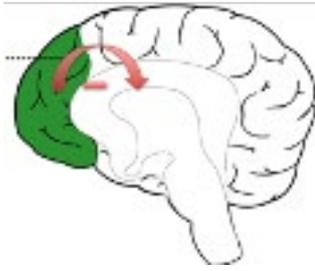
Discovering Mindfulness & Stress Reactivity



Background reading

Discovering Mindfulness and Stress Reactivity

- Our brain has older roots back in time than we think. It was developed over millions of years for one main purpose: To survive!
- The individuals of homo sapiens with the most sensitive alarm system in the brain survived and handed on their genetic blueprint.
- That is why critical events are received and stored much easier in our brain than positive ones = the negativity bias of our brain.
- We developed wonderful rather specific human brain functions with our “new homo sapiens brain” and we can change the world with these functions. But the more we encounter pressure and stress the more we are using our “old brain” and with “auto-pilot” modes of our reptilian brain we may act out ancient evolutionary survival reactions against a “sabretooth” while standing in our children’s room.
- With our “new” human brain we are able to regulate our emotions and impulses and that enables us to act in a calm and rational way = “The upper pathway of the brain”.
- In case of threat or stress we tend to use a much faster and older pathway of our brain: The lower pathway or our “Dinosaur brain”. Quickly we end up in an automatic stress reactivity: Fight – Flight or Freeze. Once we are in these threat activated modes we lose the ability to form rational perspective . From a broad perspective we then narrow into a tunnel vision of “survival” or fighting through a conflict with our children.
- As parents we are bound to live through plenty of false alarms.



The upper pathway: Our rational adult self is in charge

The prefrontal cortex is using executive functions to regulate (mainly inhibitory neuronal activity downregulating) emotions, impulses and action plans in lower brain regions.



The fast lower pathway: Our “Dinosaur brain” is at work

The prefrontal cortex is bypassed. Our Amygdala is regulating the emergency actions: fight – flight or freeze.

Mindfulness

Background

Mindfulness, as we refer to in this course, is rooted in a history of 2500 years of contemplative practices, in particular in Buddhist traditions. The reference term here is Sati (in the Pali language used way back then for early Buddhist writings) that has been translated as “to recall” as well as “to observe, to notice”. The core message was to be fully present in every moment to notice what is going on and to be able to recall it.

In the 1970's, the medical doctor Jon Kabat-Zinn was one of the leading figures in bringing mindfulness-based practices into secular contexts. He then established a mindfulness-based stress-release program for patients with chronic illnesses at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. This became the base for what is now the best known and widespread mindfulness-based programmes: MBSR – Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction.

Over the last 15 years mindfulness has become extremely popular in the Western world. Many other mindfulness-based programs have been developed (MSC – Mindful Self-Compassion, MBCT – Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, MBCL – Mindfulness Based Compassionate Living, MCP – Mindful Compassionate Parenting and others). Furthermore, it has reached the business world as much as the health field, education and many other sectors. The research on mindfulness programmes and interventions has increased exponentially over the last 15 years. And at the same time debates on use and abuse (“McMindfulness”) has reached magazines, newspapers and social media.

Definitions

- Knowing what I am experiencing while I am experiencing it. (G. Armstrong)
- Paying attention to the present moment, intentionally and non-judgmentally. (J. Kabat-Zinn)
- Awareness of the present moment with an accepting attitude. (Christopher Germer)

Practice

Mindfulness, in the sense of paying attention to what one is currently experiencing, sensing, noticing, is a human capacity everybody has at their disposal. To become able to benefit from this capacity you need to train it – just like physical muscles! So becoming and being mindful develops through regular practice and it happens generally in a formal way through meditations or in an informal way by paying attention to everyday activities such as drinking a cup of tea, waiting at the bus stop or brushing your teeth.

Attitudes to mindful living

Mindfulness as referred to here is not neutral or value-free. The neurological capacity of mindfulness is being embedded in a series of so-called attitudes to mindful living:

- Being compassionate towards all living beings including yourself.
- Being non-judgemental to your experience.
- Accepting what is.
- Having patience with what is.
- Trying to apply a beginner's mind.
- Having trust within ourselves.
- Aiming not to strive.
- Letting go of attachments.
- Gratitude and generosity.



Parenting

We invite you to turn first to the background reading and then engage in some Self-reflection on the following topic: *When do I experience stress-reactivity?*

Please identify at least one situation per day, write down what happened using the daily journal provided below. Reflect on your stress reaction along the question: *Did your reaction have more of a character of fight, flight or freeze?*



Informal Practice

Have one mindful meal per day. Just take the time, and go into detail to fully look at, smell, taste the food of this meal bite by bite...

Short version: mindfully taking the first sip of tea or coffee or tasting and chewing the first bite of some food.



Formal Meditation

Daily practice: Breathing Space

This can be used in acute stress and before it arises. But as a formal practice you can just learn and practice it without a stressful event in order to train yourself in this process.

Once you are used to it, you can stop or slow down your alarm system and its reactions and gain some time and space between your sensations and your own reaction.

The structure of this exercise is like an hourglass. There are 3 phases...

Beginning with a wide and open awareness, changing to a narrow and focused phase in the middle and slowly opening up again in the final and third phase.

There are three steps to the breathing space practice:

1. **Attend to what is.** The first step invites attending broadly to one's experience, noting it, but without the need to change what is being observed. Notice all your feelings and emotions; the body sensations, thoughts and action impulses
2. **Focus on the breath.** The second step narrows the field of attention to a single, pointed focus on the breath in the body. Stay with that focus for about ten breaths as well as you can. You may deepen your breaths a little bit in case this is helpful.
3. **Attend to the body and further.** The third step widens attention again to include the body as a whole and any sensations that are present. Then widen from this position and let your mind consider: What will be the next step? How will I handle it?

When better trained in this exercise sometimes a deep breath or two can do wonders to change our stress reactions...

So it is helpful in the first step to train the breathing space outside stressful situations. Please lead yourself through the 3 steps once or twice a day:

- Just stop and feel what's going on inside yourself.
- Take a number of soothing breaths.
- Return to whatever you were doing before.

You can find the meditations here:

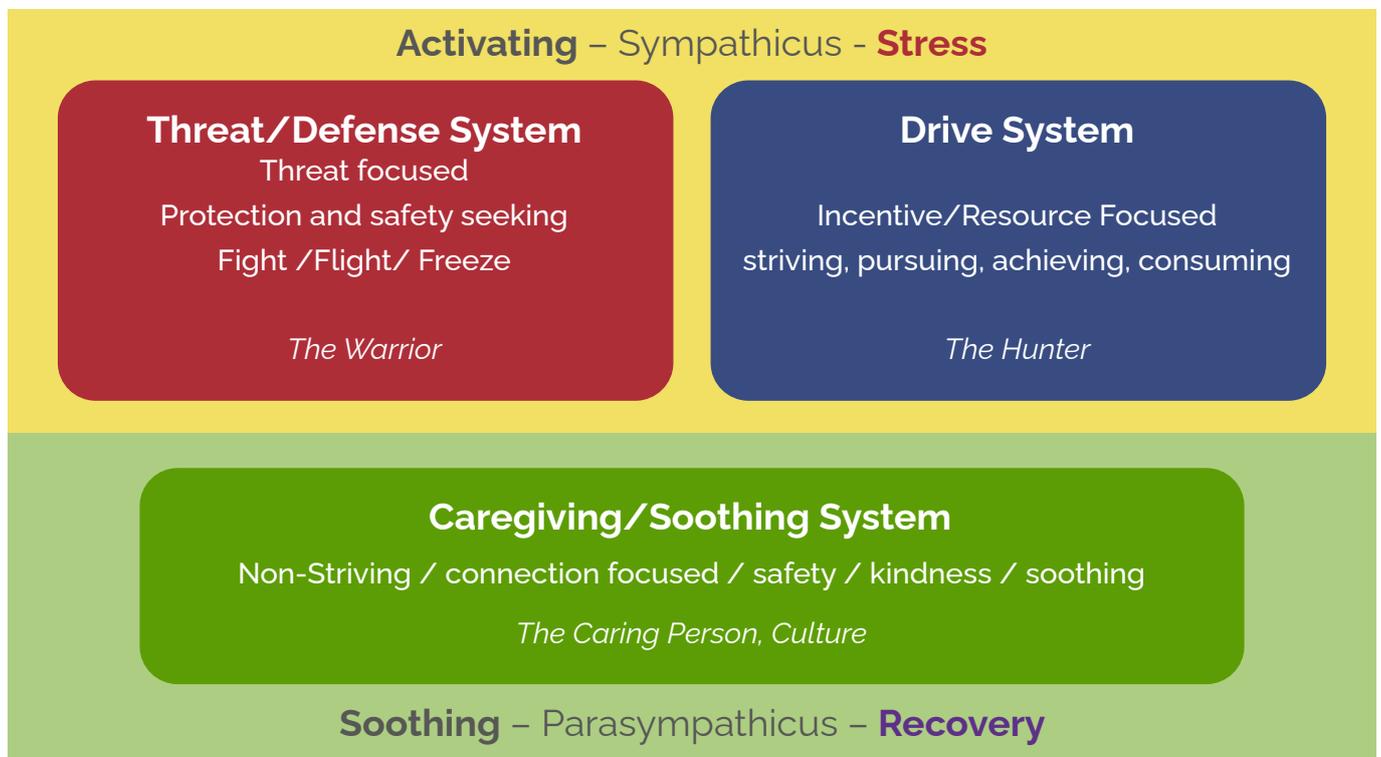
www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

Mindfulness, Stress & Evolution



Background reading

Three Emotional Regulatory Systems Model (adapted from Paul Gilbert and MBCL)



Jörg Mangold, "Wir Eltern sind auch nur Menschen!" Arbor Verlag

The THREAT SYSTEM - Red Zone

We have already talked about the center of our alarm reaction. The related emotions to the red zone are fear, anger, disgust. This system is geared toward survival and self-protection in the face of threat.

- The physical reaction of the red zone is fight, flight, freeze or faint, along with the release of adrenaline and cortisol - sympathetic arousal.
- The main **motivation** is to avoid harm. So we learn to do things in order not to have negative consequences. In the educational systems, for example, this works like: I am doing something in order to avoid bad grades, avoiding negative consequences or punishment.

DRIVE system – Blue Zone – THE RESOURCE SEEKING SYSTEM.

Although there is no immediate danger, we still need to be active in order to survive: We need to gather food, water, safety, shelter or go out hunting.

- During this stage, we have the same arousal as we have in the fight or flight stage: Adrenaline and cortisol are activating a stress response while we are in survival mode. So the main motivational learning factor is to gain or get something. This stage is associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine, once we have reached a goal, an instant feel good chemical. It is also connected to the Red Zone – anxiety – if things go wrong or we perceive failure.
- These two systems are energy consuming and designed to operate in short intervals – fighting or hunting.

SOOTHING and AFFILIATION SYSTEM – Green Zone.

This system allows us to replenish and restore – rest and digest when we are out of the two previous systems.

- Physically we are in parasympathetic mode, ready to rest, digest and replenish energy supplies.
- As humans, we bond with the group around us, feel well-being, affiliation and support. We are motivated by the wish to share, be friendly, attached and compassionate. So this system is not as self-centered or survival oriented as the other two, but instead is more group-centered.
- As mammals, we learned to feel comfort and safety through attachment from the very first moment in life. Touch and a soothing voice stimulate our soothing system. This allows us to languish in the hormones of oxytocin and endorphins, which have a long lasting effect and contribute to the basis of well-being.



Parenting

1. Looking at my child as a gemstone

Please take time and watch your child/children several times this week. Look at them with the intensity and curiosity as in the Here-and-Now-Stone-Practice (inspired by MSC) in class.

Imagine, you have never seen this precious gemstone before. It just fell down from Mars. Now watch it without a pre-concept, without reservation, without your regular patterns, with a fresh gaze! With a beginner's mind. What is there to discover, what is there to be seen in a new way? In the face, the hair? Gestures made, moves, sounds ...

2. The Red System

When does the alarm system activate? What is your own alarm response in sequence?



Informal Practice

Take some daily routine activity and carry it out mindfully every day.

How Wonderful can be to really be present in your morning shower. Instead of typically thinking about breakfast in your mind while showering, thinking about school stuff while having breakfast, thinking about your work chores while still travelling, now really stay in the present moment. You smell the shampoo, you feel the warm water rinsing your skin, you fully embrace every present moment showering.



Formal Meditation

Daily practice:

Breathing Space

Body Scan (inspired by MBSR)

Body Scan can be done in different short forms in everyday life as well as a long meditation. retrospect it was a false alarm or not can be made, for example, under findings.

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

Stress in everyday life and optimizations' traps for parents



Background reading

Regulatory Systems in our modern Industrialized Societies

Threat/Defense System

Threat focused

Protection and safety seeking

Fight /Flight/ Freeze

The Warrior

Drive System

Incentive/Resource Focused
striving, pursuing, achieving, consuming

Relentless Growth,

Maximizing

"higher, further, more"

Competition

Optimizing

The stronger one wins

The winner takes it all

Caregiving/Soothing System

Non-Wanting/Affiliative Focused

Kindness, Compassion

Soothing

Jörg Mangold, "Wir Eltern sind auch nur Menschen!" Arbor Verlag

- We humans have created a meritocracy for ourselves that defines progress as growth, as “higher, further and more”.
- The blue drive system is the determining force here. Originally active only to guarantee the basic supply, it has become an end in itself, tends to overheat and now even endangers the planet.
- Leisure time can also be stressful rather than relaxing.
- In our economic system, constant growth is the engine and competition seems to be the fuel and brings constant pressure to optimize. This has led to an attitude that makes us constantly look only at what is missing and could be better but restricts us from savouring what is already here.
- We as parents run the risk of letting life and parenting and “education” become an optimization process.
- The triple optimization trap: pressure from outside to optimize meets our innermost desire to raise our children as well as possible and to prepare them optimally for the world outside

A common distortion of perception out of this optimizing pressure is that if our children are average, that already means something bad for us as parents. Although average is normal, most biological processes go along the Gauss distribution meaning that about $\frac{2}{3}$ are in the middle range called normal and only $\frac{1}{6}$ is on either end out of that range subnormal or above normal.

So being special does not mean to be better than others, it does not rely on comparison. Being special means a bonding from our parent to child heart and letting our children feel just as they are without having to bring in achievements in order to be loved.

There is the metaphor of us as parents being the greenhouse for our children, not the gardener pruning into appropriate form. It is not our right to form them according to our wishes. It is our job to provide a nourishing climate and see what conditions they need to grow in their own means.

And that becomes very special because we do not know beforehand whether we have primroses, orchids or cacti growing in our greenhouse and nevertheless we need to watch out as to what they need to flourish in their own realm.



Parenting

1. Sharing with other parents

What puts pressure on us as parents? What influences come from kindergarten, school, grandparents that cause us stress? See background reading below.

2. Red, Blue, or Green: Focus on Drive System

At what point do I strive doggedly? What am I striving for? What must seemingly absolutely be or what must I seemingly absolutely have?



Informal Practice

Continue mindfulness in everyday life; continue to perform an everyday task mindfully.
Pause for three breaths; use breathing space.



Formal Meditation

Daily practice:
Affectionate breathing

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

Self-Compassion



Background reading

Self-Compassion

“Learning to be like a good friend to yourself during difficult or hard times”.

That's the definition of Kristin Neff, a U.S. psychology professor, and pioneer researcher on the topic of “self-compassion”. Why does that harsh, accusatory voice actually work so well in our brains?

Let's look again at our perfectly trained system for dealing with threat: We experience most threats these days as psychological threats. Yet we usually react with exactly the same survival programs: Fight = Anger, Flight = Retreat into Isolation, or play dead, feeling helpless = Freeze. Through self-judgement we create a threat for ourselves.

Building self-compassion is a rewarding journey that can completely change the way we deal with difficulties, with mistakes, with inadequacy, and with “not being perfect” in particular.

According to Kristin Neff, developing self-compassion is a three-step process:

1. the level of mindfulness: noticing what is real, even if it is difficult or hurts.
2. the stage of shared humanity: the larger perspective or “I'm not the only one who has problems, makes mistakes, or is just human, i.e. imperfect.” and the chance to connect to others.
3. the level of self-kindness: precisely because I am not well; what do I really need now? What is good for me?

Self-compassion is a valuable remedy for stress, especially the stress that comes from perfectionism, excessive inner demands, and self-judgement.

We are not principally concerned only with suffering here, but **compassion by definition** refers to **recognizing the suffering of the other and actively seeking (or at least wishing) to alleviate it.**

This attitude without suffering of the other is kindness or loving-kindness.



Parenting

1. When does the inner critic come forward and reproach oneself?

When do I threaten myself? How does it feel?

How do I get back into the green system, especially when things don't work out.

2. Red, Blue, or Green: focus on the green soothing system

Please write down at least one situation per day in which the soothing system was activated.

When do I feel connected?

When do I feel disconnected or alone?

When did I care for myself?

Use the daily journal below for noting down your observations.

Turn to the background reading before.



Informal Practice

Apply a self-compassion break several times in difficult or adverse moments.

What is a self-compassion break?

A self-compassion break is meant to invite us to be kind and compassionate with ourselves again - well suited especially when we were carried away in parenting and we are unhappy about it. Or in any other situation that is painful, difficult or when we are suffering..

The goal is to treat ourselves like a good friend when we are suffering. Especially instead of beating ourselves up by judging ourselves or ruminating about "What could I have done better?" or "I am a failure as a parent!".

Practice

As a first step: with a kind voice, mindfully acknowledge what is!

Say it inwardly in a kind voice, just as you would simply affirm it to a friend:

"This is really hard now" or

"Wow, that hurts!" or

"Something really went wrong now."

"Oh, that's painful now"

"Wow, that's exhausting ..."

And in the second step, without wanting to make that go away in any way, now let your gaze get a little wider:

Without denying that it's hard or it hurts, we connect with our humanity and other people. The key

here is to adapt the words to the situation, depending on whether it's about a "mistake," a failure, a loss, or a mishap.

"No one is perfect, including me." or

"Everyone makes mistakes, it's just human." or

"I'm not alone or the only one with this, many other people, other moms or dads are feeling the same way right now." or

"It's part of life." or

"Difficult situations like this happen in every family..."

See which words fit your situation best now and connect you with yourself and all other people: We are all only human!

Now please place a hand on your heart area or any other place where the touch feels good to you...

And in the third step: Applying self-compassion

"Just because I am not well; What do I need now? What can I use now?" or

"What is good for me now?"

Maybe saying these words... "May I be kind to myself... May I give myself what I need now".

Maybe there are kind inner words, like: "May I accept myself as I am" .

"May I be patient..., calm..., strong..." or

"May I forgive myself..."

Maybe it's something practical: call up a friend or talk to someone, have a cup of coffee, watch a nice movie...

If it's hard to find your way into kindness with yourself right now, think about what you would say to a good friend who is in a similar predicament. Or maybe what you would like to hear now from a good friend that is good for you now.

Sometimes it can also be:

"May I learn to be kinder to myself..." Or:

"May I begin to learn to be kinder to myself..."



Formal Meditation

Daily practice:

Affectionate Breathing and Body Scan in alternation

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

Motivate the Parent Self with Compassion



Background reading

Self-criticism

We often talk about the relevance of true acceptance, but there's an aspect of ourselves we typically don't want to accept - when we do not meet our own expectations. Then our inner critic shows up. This part of us can be particularly harsh when we react in harsh ways toward our children or fall short of the parent we would like to be. When we condemn ourselves because we want to do better with our children for their sake, we often feel the pain of being put down by our own inner critic. Sometimes then we would like to get rid of it, if we could. So here is a new approach in order to get to know our inner critic a little better and then transform the way our inner critic talks to us. What function does self-criticism serve, especially in our role as a parent? Is there any value in self-criticism? If so, what good may it do?

These points usually come up:

- Self-criticism motivates us to be good to our children.
- It helps us to be more aware of ourselves as parents to avoid criticism from others.
- Gives the illusion of control ("If I were better, I could avoid problems").
- Drives us to work hard to avoid everything adverse to our children
- Is less painful than opening yourself to guilt or shame.

Note that this discussion is about the harsh self-criticism, not critical discernment. The tone of the critical voice makes all the difference, as if there were "sharp blades" in your voice.

Also note that the desire to keep ourselves and/or our children safe underlies most self-criticism. The self-critic is usually trying to help us in some way, to protect us from some perceived danger, even if the methods it uses are unproductive.

It's important to remember that for some of us a critical inner voice can be internalized from early caregivers with no redeeming value whatsoever. Agreeing with harsh messages from abusive or neglectful caregivers may have kept us safe and connected when we were young, but probably not

now. When we stand up to abusive voices from the past, or start being kind to ourselves, we may feel frightened and unsafe. We are breaking an invisible contract that helped us survive when we were young. This fear can be met with self-compassion as well but participants need to proceed slowly and have access to a personal trauma counsellor.

Please note that some people do not have a harsh inner critic. Others have never explored this aspect of their experience and they cannot recognize critical self-talk but they still have a sense of deflation, discouragement, disapproval or being judged.

Note that just like the inner critic, our inner compassionate self also wants us to be safe. While providing unconditional self-acceptance, it would like us to change behaviours that are causing us harm. We're going to explore what it feels like to motivate a behavioural change from both a self-critical and self-compassionate perspective.

Guilty conscience

The guilty conscience, isn't it our constant companion as parents so often?

This is a multi-layered issue!

The voice of guilty conscience can call up for very different reasons and in very different fields, not just related to our children or family...

Sometimes it's about broken rules... sometimes it's virtues we actually want to strive for but didn't make it... sometimes we forgot something or broke a promise...

sometimes it's feeling unhelpful, unhealthy or unwell with ourselves or with others...

Sometimes it's about how we should have done things better or differently...

Sometimes we constantly have the feeling that we should do everything much better and thus constantly have a guilty conscience... it's like never reaching that level of perfectionism that we want to reach.

Sometimes simply seeing disappointed faces makes us concerned and feeling guilty...

But with our practice of self compassion we can find our inner friendly and compassionate voice and we can try to "translate" the message of our guilty conscience into what our compassionate voice would tell us...



Parenting

Positive diary

Keep a positive diary for yourself: Write down at least one positive experience per day, more if you like. Note what happens with you as you have experienced this positive experience: physically, thoughts/images, feelings, impulses to act and actions.

Use the daily journal provided.

Positive review of the day with the child

Introduce it as a ritual when saying goodnight: What was good and important for you today? Let the child experience "feeling felt"; it is about his/her perspective of the world.

We as parents so often "just" go into a well-meaning attitude "from above",

wanting to educate, convey a message. Please leave all that out!

It is better to discuss difficult topics of the day beforehand. In this way the end of the day really focuses only on the positive experiences. This also helps for a good night's sleep.



Informal Practice

Apply 5 Breaths of Happiness as often as possible.

- Throughout a day, we can experience many delightful and pleasurable moments. And, while we may not always be completely aware of all these pleasant experiences, we can begin to intentionally focus our attention in such a way that we can more fully grasp and savour these pleasant moments.
- One way to enjoy more of these moments of our lives is through our senses – they are designed to interact with the environment as life is happening. So, as we focus on our sense of sight or our sense of touch, smell, hearing and taste, the world becomes more alive and we, too, become more alive.
- Rick Hanson describes this as “taking in the good.” It is an opportunity to pause and savour these pleasant experiences... taking in, through all of our senses, the richness of life. For example, taking a nice springtime walk, the sun is shining through the first unfolding leaves in the fresh green foliage... birds are singing, maybe there is a slight breeze, and we may notice the thought, “Isn't this beautiful.” Now it either ends up as a short blink with our eyes and fades or we can intentionally enrich and collect these moments so that they stay with us.
- When we learn to pay attention through our senses and savour pleasant moments, we can offer this same opportunity to our children - to learn to pause and take in the good. To breathe in the joy and happiness of a pleasant moment. We can invite them to build skills of awareness, savouring and gratitude.
- “Hey, kids, look around at how wonderful this is! Can you feel it? How about we fill up ourselves with five breaths of happiness. Just look, feel, and see if you can breathe in and savour all of this moment. Just fill up yourself breathing in and let it become a part of yourself. Let Breathing out be part of this moment and lets share it together.”

So let's stand together, allow our senses to become aware of something pleasant and take 5 deep breaths... savouring the good, the pleasant, the joyful!

- Neurobiologically, we need a certain timespan for experiences to really be stored in our brain and become an integrated part of us. The more these experiences are meaningful and touch our heart, the easier it gets to “take them in” (let them become a lasting part of us in our memory and brain structure).

Loving kindness & Equanimity



Background reading

The four friends for life (Brahmaviharas)

Frits Koster and Erik van den Brink call these attitudes the “four friends for life” in their book “Mindfulness-Based Compassionate Living”. In the ancient Eastern wisdom teachings of Buddhism, they were called the Brahmaviharas or the “four celestial abiding states” or “the four limitless ones”. What is special about them is that these attitudes reach beyond ourselves to include all others. The necessary foundation, however, is that we apply them to ourselves as well. In this way, they make an important contribution to stress management and resilience building.

Loving Kindness or Friendliness

Assumes a benevolent recognition and appreciation of oneself.

It is an antidote to anger, (self-)devaluation, resentment.

In excess, it can lead to excessive sentimentality and dependence. Then equanimity helps.

Compassion

Presupposes self-compassion as a basis especially on a long term perspective.

Is an antidote to neglect and inflicting harm.

In excess, it can lead to pity, or to exhaustion, especially for us parents. In excess it can also lead to the tendency to get lost in the suffering of our kids or the whole world. Then, above all, the joy of living and sharing joy, and often also equanimity, can help.

Sympathetic Joy

Sharing in the joy of others without envy, presupposes a joyfulness of one's own perspective towards life.

In excess we can run into over enthusiasm and stretch to far beyond our personal resources.

Serenity or equanimity

Compassion with the ability to let go and without taking possession, but not to be confused with indifference. Presupposes an acceptance that things won't always go as we would like in life.

The application in everyday life means, to reflect (especially when we sense an inner imbalance): Which attitude, which life friend can be helpful to me in this situation?

Practical example: I am constantly worrying about the safety of my child, whether he/she is really completely well, whether I am not overlooking something. This leads to an inner tension and forms a physical and mental stress situation. I can perceive this and now instruct myself: Now the "friend of life" EQUANIMITY is helpful: It is not all in my power! And additionally the focus on more joy of life and co-joy with my child.

My care stress and impending care exhaustion are not helping my child either. Now it's time to embrace this quality for myself as well - self-care.

When we look at these four states of mind, at first glance three of them seem quite instinctively rooted in parenting and quite naturally recognisable when it comes to our children: loving-kindness, compassion, and co-joy.

Maybe it's not so easy, on the other hand, to feel kindness and compassion for ourselves.

The joy about the joy of our child comes quickly from the heart. It is more difficult when other children are having great success and ours may be in trouble... it is not so easy to be unbiased then in joy with the others...

The fourth state of mind, **serenity or equanimity**, on the other hand, is not evolutionarily or biologically anchored in us at all as parents when it concerns our children. On the contrary, we have already experienced how evolution has shaped our brain as a stress, fear and crisis artist, trying to protect our brood.

Our highly developed brains with all the abilities of forward thinking, planning, looking back and evaluating to learn from mistakes, can tip to the other side of the coin: fear, doubt and catastrophizing when looking forward; brooding and self-deprecation when looking backward.

As parents, we have to develop something like composure to some extent contrary to our laid out circuitry in the brain. This is an essential factor in coping with stress and preventing stress reactions. Acknowledging that we are not in control of everything, that there are things we cannot influence, something bigger than us. And it is a very important factor to help us let go... helping our children to grow into autonomy.



Parenting

Four friends for life

(turn to the background reading before engaging in this exercise)

Self-observation: which of the four friends in life do I need the most at this point? Which one do I want to cultivate the most?

Keep a record of triggers, your own reactions and your application.



Informal Practice

- Continue to use self-compassion pauses and taking 5 breaths of happiness, as the occasion arises.
- Doing an everyday task with the children in a conscious, attentive manner and presence, for example, when reading aloud, brushing hair, helping to get dressed, you can try even when accompanying with homework (!). I.e. being fully present, no multitasking, no already preparing the next step on the to-do list and whatever else we can think of to think about while doing "routine tasks" with our kids.



Formal Meditation

Daily practice:

Loving kindness meditation for a loved one and myself (inspired by MSC)

Loving kindness meditation with your own sentences (inspired by MSC)

Introduction and Explanation

In classical metta meditation, a whole range of people are usually chosen, from loved one to friends, sympathetic to neutral, somewhat disagreeable to quite disagreeable, to even enemies!

In Eastern practice, you start with yourself as the so-called easiest exercise. But that doesn't seem to be the case in the West. Therefore, our entry point is compassion or loving wishes for a loved one because this flows easily from our heart, especially as parents towards our children, and then focus on applying the same kindness for ourselves.

Finding your own good wishes or metta phrases

For the "may" speaks... that it is not about goal achievement, it is about the intention, the alignment... Certainly, we will not be happy all day, but why not bring yourself into the day with such a good wish... But for whom "may" is in the way, you can also express it differently.

They should be overarching values, not concrete goals as "May I earn as much money as possible..."; they also should not be pure affirmations, like "I am strong! I will become healthy!"

The actual form of metta meditation is to repeat these wishes inwardly and feel into our resonance. They are the object of meditation, where the attention rests. When our attention shifts, like it always does, we can notice it and bring ourselves back to the next inner formulation of a wish. We usually work with 2 to 4 wishes. Possibly also only in periods of time with one sentence that is central for us.

But it is also possible to informally recall such a central helpful sentence as "May I be kind(er) to myself... "May I accept myself as I am... again and again in everyday life and to speak it out inwardly...

As a practice, in just a few minutes of time, it can be very helpful to guide yourself into the day in the morning with your own good wishes; as an alignment, an orientation for our mind and heart, not expecting everything to come in that way or just feel good.



Formal Meditation

The limit of my means

Introduction and explanation

The meditation aims to facilitate a deepening of the connectedness and bonding with our children with serenity and equanimity. Realising that we have limits of what we can do in protecting our children and that gradually we have to let go and let them explore their own path of life seems an important part of parenting. It can be relieving but also often feel very uncomfortable. Practising equanimity can be helpful.

It is especially suitable for us parents, then we can imagine a child or our children as a counterpart. It can also be applied to other loved ones or people we care about and worry about a lot.

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

Mindfully Cultivating the Positive



Background reading

Three Blessings

One of the simple interventions of Positive Psychology is "3 Blessings".

You are focusing your attention on 3 positive experiences out of the last days. Experiences can be a simple moment of joy as well as a complex interaction with a positive outcome. The intention is to regularly practice looking for positive moments, experiences, interactions and bringing them on a conscious level. It is a mindful measure against our natural negativity bias. We will be turning more adhesive to positive experiences, which does not mean that we are negating the negative. It is using mindfulness to not overlook the many positive moments we experience in everyday life in a family.

An important factor of enforcing the power of the "3 Blessings"-exercise is to share them with others. It can be so helpful, once you meet friends and other parents to start up sharing 3 blessings first (rather the problems which occurred). It let's us feel sympathetic joy for the others and reminds us about so many more positive moments which have been kind of similar to what we are hearing from the others.

How helpful it can be to share 3 blessings of the day once your parent partner returns as a first report on what happened.

Asking about one or three positive things that happened can be a much more inviting questions once your kids return from school or it is a very helpful ritual at the days end in bed to ask your kids about 3 positive experience.



Parenting

1. Take a moment to reflect and look for three blessings that took part this day.

Three moments which were positive or special to you in a positive way. That could be small intense moments of being touched, it could be positive experiences with your children, moments of joy or moments you were happy about an outcome or interaction...

Hopefully you can find a whole list of such Blessings, notice them all and finally pick out 3 Blessings you find meaningful to write down and possibly share with others.

2. Nurture your own “happy child”

Practice taking time to approach the children in a relaxed and playful way, being invited or offering a game,

If something doesn't work in everyday life, take it easy with a sense of humour...



Informal Practice

Practising *Taking in the Good* when we have a good experience, especially when we were happy with something, e.g. in our parenting.

Taking in the good

(inspired by Rick Hanson and his work on Positive Neuroplasticity)

Every day we have a lot of good experiences. Even when we, as parents, have to constantly balance in our systems, the good experiences outweigh the bad. But what do we do with them? Do these many positive experiences find a reflection in our brain and in our basic mood? The negativity bias described earlier causes us to weigh critical experiences over positive experiences by a ratio of 5 to 1. We also quickly take everyday positive experiences for granted, as not worth mentioning. We simply do not enter them into our neurobiological system, so that these many positive experiences are lost to us as if through a sieve or roll off us before they can sink in and build structures in the brain. But we do something about this natural tendency and step into self-directed neuroplasticity. This means that we can influence the structure and functioning of our brain ourselves.

Rick Hanson, an American neuropsychologist, describes a method for taking in the good so that new brain structures can emerge from it. He calls it “Taking in the Good”. It involves taking two further steps in addition to having a positive experience in order to really install it: one is to enrich it.

Experience is more easily stored in our memory system when it is alive, fresh and meaningful, rich across all the senses... We can ensure this by enriching it. And we give enough time to the experience to make it present and important.

It must then be absorbed, inwardly assimilated and finally anchored. Supported by the power of our imagination, we make the experience a permanent part of ourselves and thus build a longer-lasting trait out of individual temporary states.

We do something similar quite unconsciously with very special, intense positive experiences, which burn themselves into us forever in this way, if they meet us simply in an intensity and liveliness which provides for it.

The revolutionary and special thing about the Taking-in-the-Good process is that we are not only at the mercy of the randomly happening intensity, but that we ourselves can also ensure with other positive experiences that they become long and intense enough to be significant and thus part of us, we can also build up strengths and resources, form our brain with positive neuroplasticity.

Besides "collecting" good and positive experiences and making our perception more "sticky" for them this process can also be used to really form inner traits, meaning strengths or resources.

Taking in the good for safety

The POSITIVE FOCUS - Cultivating the resource of safety. Targeted perception in everyday life: How often and when am I or my children actually safe?

What brings safety to our lives? Whenever a moment arrives and you notice it, internalise it with the procedure of "Taking in the Good".

This way you are forming an inner platform of feeling safe and the knowledge that a lot of things or circumstances are supporting being safe.

Family Life and Conflict



Background reading

Conflict and Reconciliation

Sometimes it seems to be the ideal image of parents that we should live in the family on an island of the blissful, completely without conflicts and in harmony. But when a small herd of people with very different personalities, interests and desires live in a very confined space, it is impossible to live without conflicts; that would be unnatural. All the more so when the herd is a family and there are also tasks of limitation, the so-called EDUCATION. Conflicts and small ruptures in our relationships arise all the time. This is not a drama and is part of a healthy development.

The important thing is that these ruptures can be repaired. This "repair process" takes place very early on. When toddlers conquer their world, they leave their Safety Zone, their personal circle of safety. A small rift occurs and discomfort or fear makes them quickly return to the safety zone and all is well again. Or, if Mom doesn't meet all of their needs right away, but is then present and caring again. This is how a stable bond is formed. Little by little, the circle of safety widens and the certainty grows that they can always come back there. This strengthens internal security.

The ability to recognize ruptures and to initiate repair is a crucial job for us parents. Getting ourselves back to calm after intense conflicts (or sometimes maybe even before), letting the mature adult in us back into the driving seat, is our job in terms of healthy stress management.

If we do escalate, it is up to us to show the strength and approach the child. To clarify internally whether it was the monster, the werewolf or an offended ego that was in command of our personality! Also to apologise or to initiate some other kind constructive clarification. This is not a loss of authority, on the contrary, it is damn close to what we always ask and wish from our children: to apologise, to explain oneself, to take back wrongdoings, to vow to improve.

Mindfulness-based stress management can be an important ally in this regard:

We more easily recognize when we are riling up our alarm system and learn to switch from stress response, to come out of fight or flight mode again.

Can a breathing space interrupt that in time?

Can a self-compassion pause help us to be kind to ourselves again if the exit point is long past, our emotions already rushed through?



Parenting

Self-Observation

(please turn to Background reading before engaging in the exercise)

When am I challenged by my child, when do I get into conflicts? Consciously try to understand the perspective of the child, and try to keep a record of it. Targeting repair after conflict: Is there anything to apologise for? Is there something to be clarified? Do I want to change anything? Can I, with a little distance from the conflict, acknowledge my child's perspective?

(use the daily journal provided)

Establish a separate play and fun time

Parenting is a 24-hour, 365-days-a-year, lifetime job. With our educator hat on, we try to explain the world to our children every day and make them fit in learning and practising social rules. We tend to be permanently in educator mode, constantly "on duty." This creates a high mental stress load and often gets in the way of having fun with our children.

Hence this task: set up a fun and games time.

The aim and principle is to cultivate the positive relationship between us parents and our child - important, especially in times when we are at loggerheads and rubbing each other up the wrong way. This special time is intended above all to enable us adults to adopt a conscious attitude for a defined time without the pressure of "educating-parenting" and thus to be completely present in the moment.

Play and fun time is thus a special kind of mindfulness practice; we are absolutely in the child's presence at every moment. When a child invents stories, we just get into them rather than correcting. If he or she plays tricks during a game, you can comment, "Oh, you're just making up a new game with new rules..." etc.

There are no mistakes, nothing to learn, nothing to teach. Having fun together is the only goal.

This is a wonderful form of being allowed to be a little more childish again, to fool around, to let out one's own happy child self - freed from the educator's hat. This picks up on the joy of life and one's own joy of life. If we, as typical adults, find our thoughts wandering, planning ahead or even thinking about the tax return, we can adopt the attitude from mindfulness meditation and engage in play and fun with our child again and again in a friendly and determined way.

It's also a wonderful way to do something with adolescents that suits their interests and is particularly appealing to them. Take your son to the go-kart track or your 14-year-old daughter on a shopping spree (or the other way round, if you like!), go to the high ropes course or even sit down together at the computer game that they always like to play and that we usually grumble about.

It is not so much an exercise for the time of the course as a stimulus for the whole life. Such a special time ritualised early on can grow with age and be a valuable bridge especially in the wild times of puberty and with adolescents and adult children. It might even lead to wonderful Parent/child vacations later on.



Informal Practice

Mindful introspection

When do I get angry or even feel rage?

Apply breathing spaces (Week 1) or self-compassion breaks (Week 4) in these situations.

Cultivating the resource of satisfaction

- The POSITIVE FOCUS: To specifically perceive in everyday life: What have I / we actually already achieved? Or rather, what have we already grown... what all is already there... -> Deepen with "Taking in the Good".
- The INNER FEELING COACH: I can achieve something and I usually get satisfied. I've already accomplished a lot, I'm providing for myself and my family a lot. How much more do I/we really need? What would it cost me/us in terms of effort and time?
- SELF REFLECTION: What helps me to be satisfied? Which inner strengths do I already have that help me? Which ones would I like to develop further?



Formal Meditation

Daily practice:

Mountain Meditation (inspired by MBSR)

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/

Feeling and setting limits & letting go of the ideal image of your child's future



Background reading

Yin & Yang of Self-Compassion and Compassion

The authors of MSC - Mindful Self-Compassion Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer addressed this issue of Yin and Yang in their MSC practice book.

Compassion, and with it self-compassion, is often perceived as having a soft, friendly, caring quality. We also cultivate these qualities in the exercises and meditations. This corresponds to the Yin.

But there is also a clear, energetic even fierce side to compassion. Asian wisdom teachings speak of the sword of compassion. This corresponds to the Yang.

It is easy to understand this when we imagine someone treating our children badly or even threatening them. Then compassion for the children can become the energy of the lion-mom or lion-dad, which certainly does not come across as soft and cuddly.

But how often are we challenged to clearly say NO for the sake of the children or to limit them. That is also a form of compassion. I always say compassion doesn't mean letting the kids eat a 2 kg ice cream carton until they throw up. That's where compassion means a clear STOP, even if they're clamoring.

This is the energy of Yang.

And it can also mean compassionately noticing and bearing witness to injustice or suffering inflicted on someone else and naming it clearly.

I see in compassion a connection with the guard dog and its energy at our side, advocacy for protection against suffering in a yang mode.

In self-compassion, for example, the yang side comes up through the inner motivator, which says: "And because I really mean well with you, you should now let go of or change this or that which is not good for you ...".

Or in a clear STOP or NO when our boundaries are crossed and in self-care we also resort to self-protection and make that known clearly.

Especially for the implementation as parents it is good to point out this clear energetic side of compassion.

Yin = soft and caring

Yang = clear, providing, giving protection

Both poles belong to caring and self-care.

There is a short instruction below on "Sitting in Yang" as a short meditation unit. This instruction can be inserted at an appropriate place in the course when the topic arises. We can consciously choose to do a meditation more in an inner posture of Yin or of Yang.



Formal Meditation

Sitting with Yang Energy

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/



Background reading

Setting limits

We approach this "holy grail" of educational counselling, "setting limits", from a different angle, in the sense of mindfulness and compassion. We are focusing on: Where are my limits? Where are they strained or exceeded by the children or other people? Am I even aware of this at this moment? What are my responses and reactions?

Do you know this? When something is just really important to you and you are very authentic, you sometimes can make that very clear without being loud and the children understand very clearly: "Oha, she/he means that very seriously now" and it goes clearly without a big exchange of loud words.

That's what we mean by authentically sensing our own limits or our own needs and presenting them out of this authenticity: this is important now.

This is what "perceiving and making known one's own limits" is all about, while respecting the limits of others, of course.

If we are not in tune with ourselves, then there can be an eternal back and forth.



Parenting

Limits and boundaries

Experiencing ones own boundaries in contact with the child, feeling them, lovingly setting limits authentically...

(Turn to background reading before engaging with this exercise)

Self-observation should sharpen your view when one's own boundaries are touched or even exceeded. Often we only notice this afterwards, when the mood changes, when we are under pressure or get into conflicts. Sometimes, however, we do not maintain our boundaries precisely in order to avoid conflicts.

“Green” time with your child

Consciously perceive experiences of pleasure and connection with the child:

- a walk of discovery with children's eyes
- Accept and extend invitations to play from your child
- Maintaining physical contact and savouring it: e.g. taking your bigger children in your arms, rolling on the floor with small children...



Informal Practice

Being mindful of my boundaries in general, not just in parenting

When do I perceive my boundaries? When are they crossed and by whom? How do I notice this? How do I deal with it?

Using the self-compassion break (Week 4) when a boundary of mine has been crossed.

Cultivating the resource of connectedness

The POSITIVE FOCUS: To perceive specifically in everyday life: How connected am I to whom? Partner, children, family, friends? Other people? Animals, plants, nature? => Deepen with “Taking in the Good” (Week 7). What old friendships do I have that I don't see every day, but that warm my heart? Do I want to reactivate those contacts, write an email or a letter, plan a visit to a long standing friend I haven't seen and would dearly miss if he/she wouldn't be here anymore?”

The INNER COMPASSIONATE COACH:

“I can take care of myself and I'm connected”.

“I am not alone, I am living with shared humanity and compassion”.

“If there is a lack of connection, if I feel isolation...” then self-compassion rather than self-accusation is a first step.

When I feel drained and sucked dry, “What are the positive qualities of the relationships in which this is happening? Do I have the positive in view when it comes to my connection to the child, needy partner or friend? Do I have myself sufficiently in view, my right and duty to self-care and self-compassion?”

SELF REFLECTION:

"How do I nurture connectedness? Even to nature, to my pet? Do I really notice and enjoy all the bonds I have built in my life? Last but not least, if one exists: How am I nurturing my partnership? Maybe I can plan on some act of kindness, some perfect surprise for my partner?"



Formal Meditation

Daily practice:

One for me, one for you (inspired by MSC)

Introduction

The image or metaphor of the bowl of love, compassion or care is introduced, which can be most active when it is filled and overflowing rather than running empty. Spending care and compassion without refilling oneself usually leads to running on empty and burning out.

This meditation is a combination of affectionate focus on the breath, combined with an inner focus on benevolence with wishes for oneself and compassion for others.

It can become very important as our own source of regeneration, in the maintenance of self-care, especially in times of high stress and demanding care for our children, partner or other people closely connected to us.

It can be used as one tool in stress management for parents, on the one hand, when stresses already exist, but also as a preventive measure to maintain the balance between care and self-care.

This exercise can be used as a longer meditation for resourcing and inner connection, or as a shorter awareness exercise in the acute demand of a difficult interaction. For example, on the edge of a bed with a sick feverish child... or when we think about our child, for whom we are deeply concerned, or even someone who is absent that we want to connect with compassion. Or a child in puberty, who does not seem to be doing well at the moment, but who does not want to let us approach, can thus be integrated into compassion and a feeling of connection.

When caring for someone becomes very stressful and challenging, this breathing mode "in for me and out for you" in the situation itself can remind us that we are also allowed to look and feel for ourselves and perhaps allow a little inner distance between closeness and distance to be regulated so that there is a connection without exhausting ourselves in it.

You can find the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/



Parenting

Letting go of the ideal image of your child's future

We all have wishes and ideas about our children. Here is an exercise to reflect on this with three sections.

Note: Read first the whole exercise and note if you feel an inner readiness to do it for yourself. Make sure you understand the different steps and then do it calmly and with full attention. Do it if you have at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time.

Sit in a comfortable position, feel into your body and anchor yourself with a few calm breaths for as long as you need right now.

...

Now imagine an already independent and happy older "version" of your child. If you have more than one choose one for the sake of this exercise. You can redo this exercise any time you want.

Depending on how old your child is now, maybe in 10 to 15 years, or when he or she is between 25-30 years old. Let your imagination run wild, as if you were a fairy or a wizard.

...

What do you want for your child's development? What school and type of education are you thinking of? Is there an occupational field you would wish for your child? How and where does your child live in your imagination, alone or with a family of his or her own? What preferences could your child develop, what assets or talents does he/she have?...

Save this picture and now take a closer look yourself.

Which wishes do you recognise as your own ones for your own life?

Maybe things that have become very important to you in life, maybe things you have always wished for?

Perhaps you also discover parts that arise from the wish that your child should be better off than you are?

What is it in this fantasy of the future that you have created that makes only your child happy?

...

As a third step, create another, **also happy and content "version"** of your independent child. But this one is different from the previous one: If your child was a professor in the first version, then let them be a craftsman now. If they were rich, let them now lead a very simple life (without hardship). If they played the piano or painted, now let them scream in a punk band. Instead of living in a house in the country, let him/her now live in a small flat in the big city. Instead of a life in a family, they might be on the road all the time as a documentary filmmaker. Just consciously design a counter-version to the first one and imagine your child happy and content in it.

...

Can you even go further with this? Are there perhaps life choices your child could make that you would not be happy with? Could you also play out such visions of the future with a still content "version" of your child? They emigrate to Canada to live a very simple life as a hermit? They decide to give away all possessions and set off as a globetrotter?

Maybe the image of your child with a very well-paid job in the gun lobby would send shivers down your spine? As a leader in the wrong political party?

But sense carefully what is going on inside of you! Can you imagine completely different "versions" of your child that are completely contrary to your wishes in the first "version"? Do you see a happy child in spite of everything?

Just let go a little of your own ideal image of your child!

This is how you create space - for yourself and for your child.

Embracing your Life



Background reading

In search for joy

Introduction

Old joy, new joy...

How important it is for children to see parents enjoying life. How nice it is to have a mother, a father, who have an inner joy and fun in life and also show that as opposed to parents who are presenting that life as being constantly under pressure or who experience life as an exhausting battle against to-do lists.

This is not to say that everything is easy. It's simply saying that the zest for life we cultivate for ourselves as parents and as adults is such an important gift to our children.

Why not put a firm **appointment with joy as a fixed weekly date on the calendar?**

This is just as important as the dentist appointment or other appointments.

Really set a time zone in the calendar: **Now I'm dating joy!** Maybe some of the appointments with joy are for me alone.

Refuelling your own joy gives you strength and serenity for everyday family life.

Maybe that's where the "joy for all" dates come in.

Are these not ultimately the most important dates in the weekly calendar? And how often have they so far found a permanent place where we maintain them?

It will be the memories that your children carry with them into old age, those moments of shared joy.

Parents with young children know this well... everything has turned now and focuses only on the nest-building and brood-care, the partnership and relationship-care can be mostly in the background during these years.

When we feel there is stress and lots of obligations we usually cut down on things that seem not to be absolutely necessary. These are often the heart warming things. In very short stretches of time this works, but in the long run we are depriving ourselves of all the nurturing and replenishing things of joy. we run the risk of burning out.

So how about the things that fill your own heart? hobbies and former islands of joy... how about remembering what brought you joy in life... sometimes it's very touching to think again of these... A bridge to revitalise these can also be to show the children these islands, what gives you pleasure or has given you pleasure.

Conversely, the children often offer us many invitations... dam building, other games or adventures... So why not activate our inner happy child and join in again and again!

Practice

Take a few quiet deep breaths and openly feel what arises in your awareness from moment to moment.

Let these questions just flow through your mind, let them ring and resonate in you. Give each question enough time to go a little further and deeper after the first thoughts that appear to let more thoughts emerge.

What do you feel joy in doing?

What activities do you enjoy?

What do you experience with anticipation with just thinking about it until you get to do it again?

When do you experience joy in being?

Simply having fun without it having to have a goal, or to have a benefit, not even serving a purpose?

When do you experience joy in playing?

How, where, with whom are you playing with for fun?

What is playful in your life?

Are there **things that used to bring you a lot of joy** that may have fallen a little asleep now or have been forgotten?

Seek out old islands of joy...

Maybe you'd like to revive one or two?

All for yourself... and maybe there is also the possibility to visit old personal islands of joy now with your partner, with the children or the whole family and to reactivate them, maybe in a different way now?

Gratitude

Introduction

Some people have a problem with the term gratitude, maybe because someone has been forced to be grateful too often. Or because it seems like we need to be upwardly grateful to someone else. Did that happen to someone perhaps? We can feel gratitude just like that, without having to have a context other than life as such. If the term doesn't invite you at all, you can also use terms like positive experiences or blessings etc.

The advantage with gratitude is that it doesn't just involve great events or really good feelings or especially nice things, We can also be grateful for things we take for granted.

Gratitude is one of the few ways we can change our own basic attitude of well-being. By cultivating gratitude we can slowly change our "baseline", from pessimism or a negative view of things to the perception of all that supports and carries us, into a positive view that is life-affirming. This helps us to perceive all the so-called self-evident things with a positive view. Gratitude is one way to turn this negative bias of our brain around. With regular gratitude exercises we become more attentive, magnetic for these moments so to speak.

There is good study data on this that demonstrate the helpful effect of gratitude practice.

Practice

There are several methods for a gratitude practice:

- **A wonderful exercise to end the day is offered by Chris Germer at MSC:** Every day in bed, collect the 10-finger gratitude before going to sleep. It is also helpful for sleep, it helps to go into the world of dreams with real positive experiences and thoughts.
- Another good way to maintain a regular gratitude practice is to **keep a gratitude diary or journal**. E.g. write down in a calendar book every day 3 points for which you can be thankful. You can also describe them in more detail, What happened? What did it do for you? What have you done so it could take place?...
- And a **multi-year journal**, e.g. a 3- or 5-year gratitude journal, can have a special appeal. From the 2nd year on we can find the entries of the previous years again... that is nice and motivates us especially to really have an entry every day.
- There are families who have a large bowl and **everyone can write moments of gratitude** on small pieces of paper and put them there. Regularly, everyone sits down together and reads these notes aloud and enjoys them.

To bring the scientifically proven positive effect, however, a **regular** persistent implementation is needed.

It tends to get bogged down in between, but it can be picked up again every single day.

It can happen to you with regular practice that you go out of the house in the morning and feel the rays of the sun and you say to yourself: Wow, there is already the first finger twitching for tonight ... And you are met by a smile: Wow, there is already the next ...

You may develop "**gratitude**" **movement!**, a **twitch of your fingers**... A wonderful side effect that shows our gaze is trained and magnetic to capture these moments.

Self-Appreciation

Were there also points in your own gratitude list where you were grateful for your own qualities or something about yourself? Often we leave out these points.

Take a few moments to **think of two or three things you appreciate about yourself**. Something that you really like about yourself or that you can find as your strengths or resources..

Return to love

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Excerpt from: Marianne Williamson - 1993

Follow up



Informal Practice

- Practice **“Taking in the Good”** several times a day
- Practice **mindfulness in everyday life** - eating mindfully, playing with the kids mindfully, etc.
- **Self-Compassion Breaks**
- Do the **10-finger gratitude exercise** regularly on your own; can also be introduced as a daily review with the child
- Create **compassionate letters** to make it easier for yourself in difficult moments, cultivating the qualities of self-kindness and self-compassion.



Meditation

Continue meditating according to your own wishes; Choose one or two meditations you resonate with. If possible find a place in your house you can “prepare” for your meditations - making it inviting for you!

Try to find a moment in your week where you can schedule it easily.ù

You can find all the meditations here:

www.mindfulcompassionateparenting.org/en/mcp-meditations/



Parenting

1. for parenting couples

Nurturing the couple relationship as partners;

An official invitation to the partner, for a candlelight dinner or any other enterprise as partner.

Exchange about children and education at this time strictly forbidden!

2. for single parents

Invitations to Myself: I want to be with you.

Go out and have fun! I want to find moments to just enjoy the unwind

And those gifts can go on for the rest of parenthood!



MINDFUL
compassionate
PARENTING