



## Empowering your Family: How to Improve Communication and Decrease Stress

Connecting and being present with your kids starts with you being connected and present with yourself:

- ★ Important to cultivate your own practice & doing your own work
- ★ Embody and model what you teach
- ★ **Self-care:** it's important to fill your cup first and to also model the importance of self-care to your child

Studies have shown that parents who create time for self-care are better able to handle their own stress and have happier children. **Why?** Because making time for self-care enables you to be compassionate to yourself and more compassionate towards your child.

### MINDFULNESS & BREATHING EXERCISES

These exercises can center and calm you and your child:

- ★ Neck rolls & shoulder shrugs to release tension
- ★ Dance & Shake!
- ★ Colouring
- ★ Take a walk through nature
- ★ Take “breathing breaks” every few hours, offering yourself the space to restore and replenish your energy, instead of rushing
- ★ Schedule it in like you would a meeting or lunch break until it becomes a habit
- ★ Focusing with your senses: listening to sounds in a room, smelling your food before eating it, tasting every bite as you chew
- ★ Visualization: beach, forest, etc.
- ★ Candle meditation

## PRACTICE FOR MINDSET

### MIND DUMP - EMPTYING YOUR MIND OF ALL THE THOUGHTS

In order to help shift your mindset from focusing on all the challenges or “problems” in your life to focusing on all the opportunities and solutions you need to develop a daily practice of shifting your thoughts. **Your thoughts are so powerful they can directly impact your experiences.** This practice is designed to help you become more aware of your thoughts and how to shift the more negative or draining thoughts to more positive and feel-good thoughts.

**Step 1: Empty your mind into a notebook.** Spend a few minutes each day and write down everything you are thinking about throughout the day. The thoughts you can't seem to get rid of, the thoughts you are dwelling on, the thoughts that randomly pop into your head. Worry thoughts, draining thoughts, happy thoughts, any thoughts - write them all down.

**Step 2: Feel Check.** Once you have written down all the thoughts in your head, you now go through each of the thoughts and you classify them as “feel good” or “feel bad” thoughts by placing an X beside the thoughts that don't feel good and a check mark beside the ones that do feel good. Be honest with yourself and if it is a bit of both it is still an X, it can be improved.

**Step 3: Shift Your Perspective and Shift Your Thought.** Now you go to work and change every ‘feel bad’ thoughts into a ‘feel good’ one. If you can't find a way to shift your perspective and change the thought then come up with an entirely new thought that feels good. Something you are grateful for, looking forward too, etc. Rewrite your story and create a shift in your mindset.

## PRACTICES FOR PUTTING SELF-CARE INTO ACTION

### CREATIVITY/SPONTANEITY COMMITMENT

If we are engaged and living a life on purpose we often feel very good about ourselves. Take some to look for and acknowledge what makes you feel fulfilled. **Engaging in creative activity can support this.** Here are some suggestions to connect to your creative energy. It is important to commit to not judging yourself, as ALL people have access to creative energy and the more you practice using it, the more it will flow freely through you.

- ★ **Write in a daily journal** (e.g., write thoughts, feelings, questions, stories, poems, etc)
- ★ **Paint freely** (e.g., grab a blank canvas, some brushes and acrylic paint and just paint - don't control what comes out, just allow it)

- ★ **Listen to a new style of music and move with it** (e.g., create your own dance) this can be done in the privacy of your own home or shut the door to your classroom and do this before the students arrive
- ★ **Do something new** you haven't ever done before (try a new restaurant or type of food, play tourist in your own city, etc.)
- ★ **Do the same things you do every day, differently** (take a different route home and pay attention, try a different exercise class at the gym, walk sideways, walk around your neighbourhood without knowing where you are going)
- ★ **Become a student again** and re-engage your desire to learn and grow (take a class in something you are interested in, learn a new skill or language, etc.)

The intention of this practice is to invoke your sense of creativity by committing to becoming more spontaneous. **Stop overplanning, get back in touch with your joie de vivre by going with the flow!** Ironically, or synchronistically, this would translate into your whole life - career, personal, etc! You could even start with changing up your route to work or your spot in the parking lot, taking a walk at lunch, try a dance class, eat something new, the possibilities are endless!

## DISCONNECTION TIME

We spend so much of our time mentally stimulated - so much so we don't tend to give our brain a break even when we are physically resting. It is equally important to give our brains a break and the disconnect from all the distractions life brings around us. This practice is all about creating space every day where you disconnect from everyone and everything around you, especially technology. **For 10 minutes MINIMUM every day try practicing disconnecting from your outer world and reconnecting to your inner world.** That means turning off your phones and all other technologies!

### Suggestions you can try:

- ★ **Sit quietly in a private space**, put on some soft music or binaural beats and just focus your attention to listening to the sounds and breathing deeply in and out
- ★ **Go for a walk outside** without your phone and listen to the sounds around you
- ★ Practice a **guided meditation**
- ★ **Close your eyes** and allow your body to gently sway from side to side, and allow your body to then move in whatever way feels good
- ★ **Take yourself out to dinner** to your favourite restaurant and leave your phone in the car (people watch, increase your sense of smell, observe your surroundings, reflect on your feelings)

## CONNECTING TO NATURE

Connecting to nature becomes a source of refueling ourselves in order to show up as our best self both at home, at work, and for ourselves. There is evidence that engaging in activities such as 'earthing' (e.g., getting in nature and feeling a connection to the earth) is a powerful tool in allowing ourselves to feel a sense of deep connection to our lives; to ourselves and to others.

- ★ **Take a walk alone for about 15 minutes** each day (this can be done before school or during a break time)
- ★ **Take a walk with a colleague** (during this time remember to have positive conversations or seek advice about specific situations with permission from the other party)
  - Remember to **BE PRESENT** outside; take in the sounds, sights and scents as you walk
  - Observe your surroundings and remember to **BREATHE** in the fresh air (you might even visualize allowing any worry or concern to leave and be taken by the earth (trees/air/leaves))

## CREATING A HOME WITH LESS JUDGEMENT

The word judgement often has a lot of negative attachments to it. We tend to make judgements all the time. Some are negative and some are positive. Regardless, judgement in the negative sense can cause a lot of kids to feel as though they are not able to share how they are feeling or about situations they are going through. Begin to cultivate a home with less judgement by completing or trying some of the following tips:

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

- ★ **Listen consciously** - Listen to understand instead of listening to respond. When you interrupt, you take control and take the focus away from them, which makes them feel like they're not being heard. Instead of controlling them or trying to fix their problems, empower them to come up with their own solutions
- ★ **Accept** that your child is different than you - **value** their uniqueness
- ★ **Honour** where they're at right now, instead of enforcing your beliefs or expectations on them
- ★ **Support** them in making their **own decisions**
- ★ **Listen** more than you speak
- ★ **Conflict management** - conflict arises from the inability to see eye to eye - if each understands and empathizes with each other, then you can prevent the conflict before it even happens

- ★ **Spend time together** & have fun
- ★ If your kids aren't sharing enough with you, instead of playing 20 questions (which is a game of control for them), share you own life's experiences, **be open and vulnerable**. You're giving them the space and permission to share. Vulnerability and openness create trust and a connection
- ★ Keep up with their interests – find **mutual interests** with them
- ★ Be a loving parent
  - Show **love** to them
  - **Celebrate** their wins
  - **Forgive** their mistakes
  - Be their biggest **cheerleader**
  - Focus on how **good** they already are

## EMPOWERED COMMUNICATION

As parents we generally want to offer immediate solutions to the problems that are shared with us. Although it is amazing that we have such wisdom and desire to share, sometimes we need to offer something more hands off. A different approach would be to empower your child in sharing to create their own resolution while acknowledging that you truly hear and support them. Here are a few suggestions to help you as you empower your kids to find their own solutions.

- ★ Use '**I statements**': In this case we move away from the 'you should do this...' perspective and move toward the following 'I believe...I wonder what would happen...I understand you are saying...I think this is what I would do....' etc
- ★ **Get curious**: Ask questions to the questions you are being asked, invite them to come to their own conclusions and then guide them if necessary if what they are saying isn't factual (be mindful you are not working on perspective/opinion versus factual information)
- ★ Invite a more **collaborative approach**, encourage asking others (another parent/guardian, siblings, friends) who has been through the same experience or seeing what their opinion is and then see what they feel most comfortable doing