

The SOLUTION source

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter
By Matt Biehn, Clinical Counsellor, Thunder Bay Counselling Centre

For You & Your Family

Fall 2016

The Mindful Way Through Life

Fall is a time that provides us an opportunity to develop a new way of relating to our commitments. In preparing to return to school or to return to work from a summer break, it can be helpful to make an intention to not fall into our old unhelpful patterns. Challenges will arise in our lives and although we can struggle to avoid them, this struggle often becomes the source of our suffering. It is up to us how we relate to the thousand joys and the thousand sorrows that life inevitably brings us. Will we be washed away by their relentless deluge? Will we struggle against them each step of the way? Can we find a third way that allows us to navigate the stream of our life skillfully? Every raging river ends in a calm pool; can we develop the skills to navigate its turbulent waters with grace and ease?

IN THIS ISSUE:

R.A.I.N. - 4 Steps to Mindfulness	2
Bringing the Benefits of Mindfulness to Our Work	3
Going Back to School Mindfully	4

Know from the rivers
in clefts and in crevices:
those in small channels flow noisily,
the great flow silent.

Whatever is not full makes noise.

Whatever is full is quiet.

- Siddhartha Gautama


counselling centre of east algoma **counselling** centre de d'algoma est

R.A.I.N. - 4 Steps to Mindfulness

Tara Brach teaches us a way to apply mindfulness to any situation that we come across in 4 steps:



R

RECOGNIZE WHAT'S GOING ON

Tara says that recognizing means consciously acknowledging, in any given moment, the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are affecting us. Like awakening from a dream, the first step out of this trance is simply to recognize that we are stuck, subject to limiting and constricting beliefs, emotions, and physical sensations. Common signs of the trance include a critical inner voice, feelings of shame or fear, the squeeze of anxiety or the weight of depression in the body.



A

ALLOW THE EXPERIENCE TO BE JUST AS IT IS

According to Tara, allowing means letting the thoughts, emotions, feelings, or sensations we have recognized simply be there. Typically when we have an unpleasant experience, we react in one of three ways: by piling on the judgment; by numbing ourselves to our feelings; or by focusing our attention elsewhere. For example, we might have the sinking, shameful feeling of having been too harsh in correcting our child. Rather than allowing that feeling, we might blame our partner for not doing his or her part, worry about the next thing on our to-do list, or decide it's time for a nap. In doing so we are resisting the rawness and unpleasantness of the feeling by withdrawing from the present moment.



I

INVESTIGATE WITH KINDNESS

Tara explains that investigating means calling on our natural curiosity and directing a more focused attention to our present experience. Simply pausing to ask, "What is happening inside me?" can initiate recognition, but investigation adds a more active and pointed kind of inquiry.

You might ask yourself: How am I experiencing this in my body? What am I believing? What does this feeling want from me? You might notice hollowness or shakiness, then discover a sense of unworthiness and shame masked by those feelings. Unless you bring them into awareness, your unconscious beliefs and emotions will control your experience and perpetuate your identification with a limited, deficient self.



N

NATURAL LOVING AWARENESS

Tara concludes by saying that natural loving awareness occurs when identification with the small self is loosened. This practice of non-identification means that our sense of who we are is not fused with any limiting emotions, sensations, or stories. We begin to live from the openness and compassion that is expressed in our natural awareness. We each have the conditioning to live for long stretches of time imprisoned by a sense of deficiency, cut off from realizing our intrinsic intelligence, aliveness, and worth. The greatest blessing we can give ourselves is to recognize the pain of this trance, and regularly offer a cleansing rain of self-compassion to our awakening minds, bodies and hearts.

Bringing the Benefits of Mindfulness to Our Work

Mindfulness is a state of mind that takes effort and practice to cultivate. Many practices such as meditation, yoga, time spent away from technology and time spent in nature help to cultivate mindfulness but the mind needs the focus and consistency of a regular practice if it is to undo old neural patterns and learn new ones.

Even people who generally enjoy their work can experience a lot of stress throughout the workday. The pressures and demands of working with others and meeting timelines are constant. Out of touch with feelings and the thinking patterns that reinforce stress and anxiety, many people constantly “re-trigger” negative habits throughout the day. Mindfulness practice offers us an opportunity to learn how to engage our workplace tasks with focus and clarity while leaving the stress behind.



8 WAYS TO PRACTICE

Louise Altman identifies 8 ways that mindfulness can be used in the workplace.

1. Make a commitment to practice. Essentially mindfulness is the art of being an observer of your self; your thoughts, feelings and your behaviors. And: Is doing this bringing me closer to my goal?
2. Start slowly, today I will become more aware of _____ and practice by placing your attention on that. The way you breathe is a good start!
3. Start each day with a few minutes of conscious awareness. Instead of jumping out of bed into your routine or hitting the snooze button, take a few minutes to notice how you feel and to connect with your breath.
4. Focus on slowing yourself down. Even if you have to get many things done in a short period of time, you can control the racing to-do list in your mind.
5. Practice really listening to others. This requires you to shift your energy to the other person and take the focus off you and your mental to-do list, even for a few minutes.
6. Pay close attention to your posture. The way we use our body has a powerful effect on closing our attention down or opening it up
7. Watch your language. The words you use cue your physiology. When you tell a colleague that you are “slammed” in terms of work, you are sending signals to your brain that it is having or about to have an unpleasant experience.
8. Find some time, at the end of your workday or in the evening for self-reflection. It’s challenging to do this without judgment. Discernment and judgment are very different. Practice noticing without judging.

Going Back to School Mindfully

SUMMER GRATITUDE

As summer comes to an end, it is helpful to take time to express and share our gratitude for what the season offered. Whether we take time before a meal or make time elsewhere, encourage your children and everyone present to take some time to reflect on their favourite moments from the summer.

Try to think of specific experiences or moments in time; the feeling of sitting on rocks warmed by the sun, the taste of fresh berries that you picked, an uproar of laughter, a beautiful scene. Taking time to appreciate experiences like these can help children develop their own ability to appreciate other events like them.

The ability to appreciate the beauty in the world around us is a skill that we can support our children to develop. Over time, this ability can help children to find the beauty in everyday experiences - yes - even at school.

SETTING INTENTIONS

Setting intentions can help children to focus their energy on the things that they value. Whether it's setting an intention for the fall, for a month, for the first week of school, or even just for the day, setting intentions is about taking the time to identify something that is personally meaningful for your child.

Children may set an intention to meet a new friend, try a new activity, work on organization skills, or even just to notice moments that make them feel good or laugh.



COMING SOON!

The Counselling Centre of East Algoma will be expanding our services to Blind River and the North Shore! We will soon have a community crisis worker as well as another counsellor available 5 days a week from a new location. Stay tuned for details.

Call the Counselling Centre of East Algoma at 705 848 2585 to learn more.