

Mindfulness Unpacked

by Amanda O'Regan-Marchand,
Executive Staff Officer, Professional Learning

Hello, colleagues:

First, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for all you do to support students and their families every single day. This is no small task and this year is an incredibly challenging one in so many ways.

A lot has been asked of you since March 2020 and you have risen to the challenge. However, we wonder where you are fitting in time to take care of yourselves.

In this brief read, I hoping you will have at least one idea that you can take away that will help to provide pause and some breathing space as you go about your day.

So, let's take a moment to 'be' together before you have to go do. This is a quote from an incredible yoga teacher in Antigonish. In leading a practice, she challenges her participants to push themselves as far as they can, while listening to their bodies and extending just outside their usual comfort zone-creating growth. Pause and listen. Return to your breath and make time to "be". The "do" will always be there waiting. Let it wait.

In preparing our newest professional learning offering, a workshop, *The Well Teacher*, I had the opportunity to meet with NSTU counsellor Sandra Murray. She shared another term that really resonated with me. "Take a moment. Take a breath right now. Smell the cookies. Blow out the birthday candles. Ponder this question: In

your current situation, are you a human "being" or a human "doing"?*" If you identified more with the latter, how can you change that? How can we help?

Take small steps. A moment, a breath, a new idea to try. Here is one from the resource, *The Mindful Self Compassion Workbook* by Kristen Neff, PhD. "Treat yourself as you would your closest friend. When you are in a moment of discomfort and your worries start to take over, try to sit with the feeling and take deep breaths. Imagine that you are sitting with your closest friend who is feeling the same way. What would you say to them? Turn towards yourself and sit with the words of wisdom and experience. Give yourself permission to follow this advice."

A goal you can try to work toward during your workday (The Well Teacher, Wade Repta) is around saving your voice (pages 182 & 183). Tips where possible include staying hydrated as much as possible, structuring your day around your voice needs, alternating classes requiring more voice participation than others, using hand signals, and practicing belly breathing. Practicing deep breathing gives your voice a rest, clears out your airways and helps to decrease levels of anxiety and stress.

During your day, try to make time to check in with yourself. There are many

journals that can help with this goal that provide short but meaningful time to sit in awareness with your body, your thoughts and your feelings and allowing yourself this pause can help you to wipe away the "cobwebs" and move towards clarity.

Finally, try to choose a transition activity to and from work. This is a signal to your mind and heart to create a boundary for when you start preparing for and stop thinking about (or ruminating over) your day. This could be a walk after work, how you enter your workspace (a chime or a purposeful action or set of actions), a morning podcast meditation or another activity that signals to you that you have arrived at work. For the end of the day that signals that your work day is 'done' could include turning off your work computer, closing the door to your learning space with a deep breath and intention to try to leave work at work by actively shifting your thoughts during your "me" time! Making a commitment to yourself not to check your work email during the evening will also help to reinforce this boundary.

Your team here at the NSTU hope that some of these ideas help to start to decrease your levels of overwhelm. We will include more tips and tricks in future issues so please keep an eye out!

* Quote shared from former NSTU Counsellor, Peter Mullaly.