Move & Play the Stress Away

Course Book

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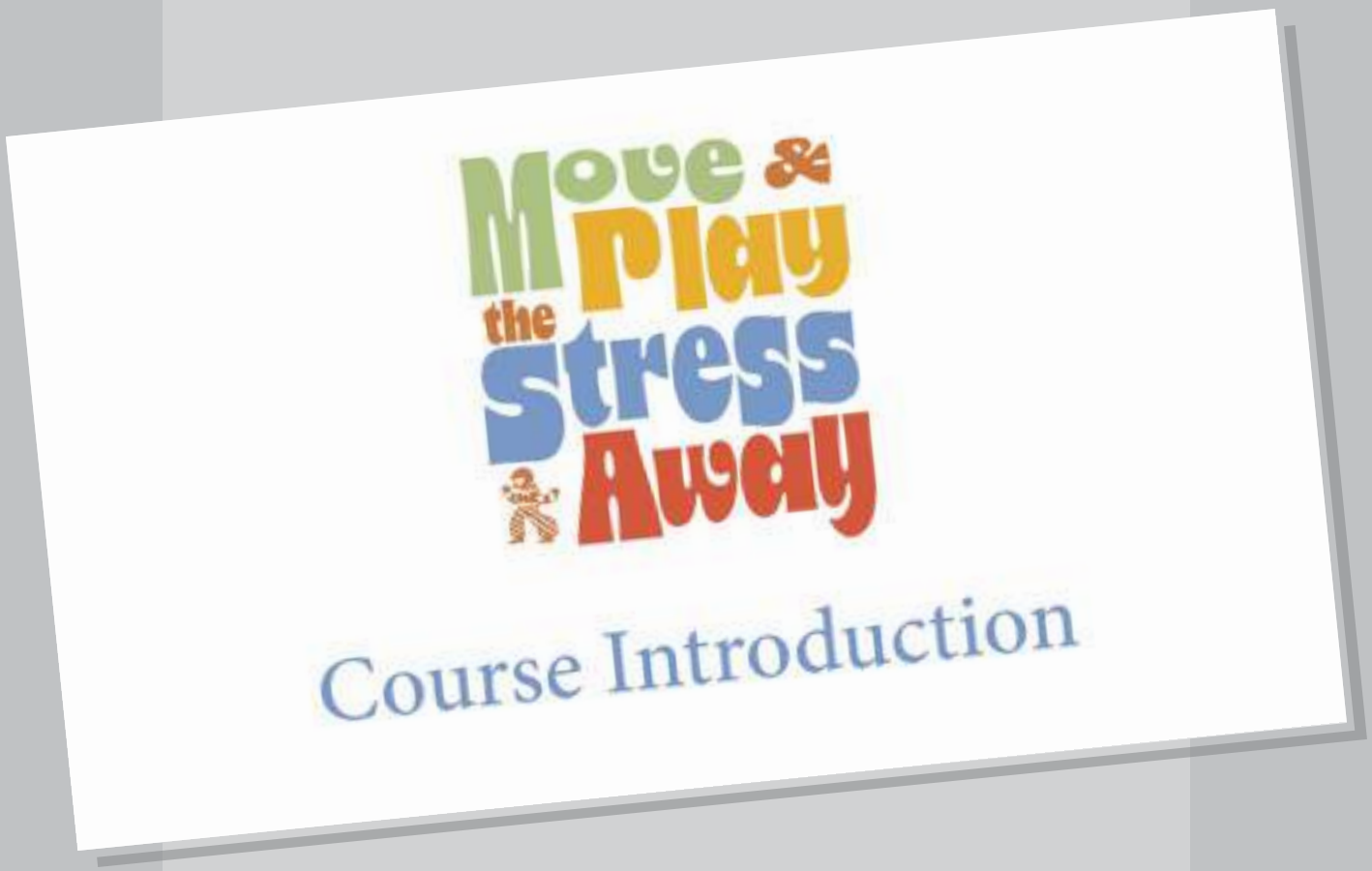
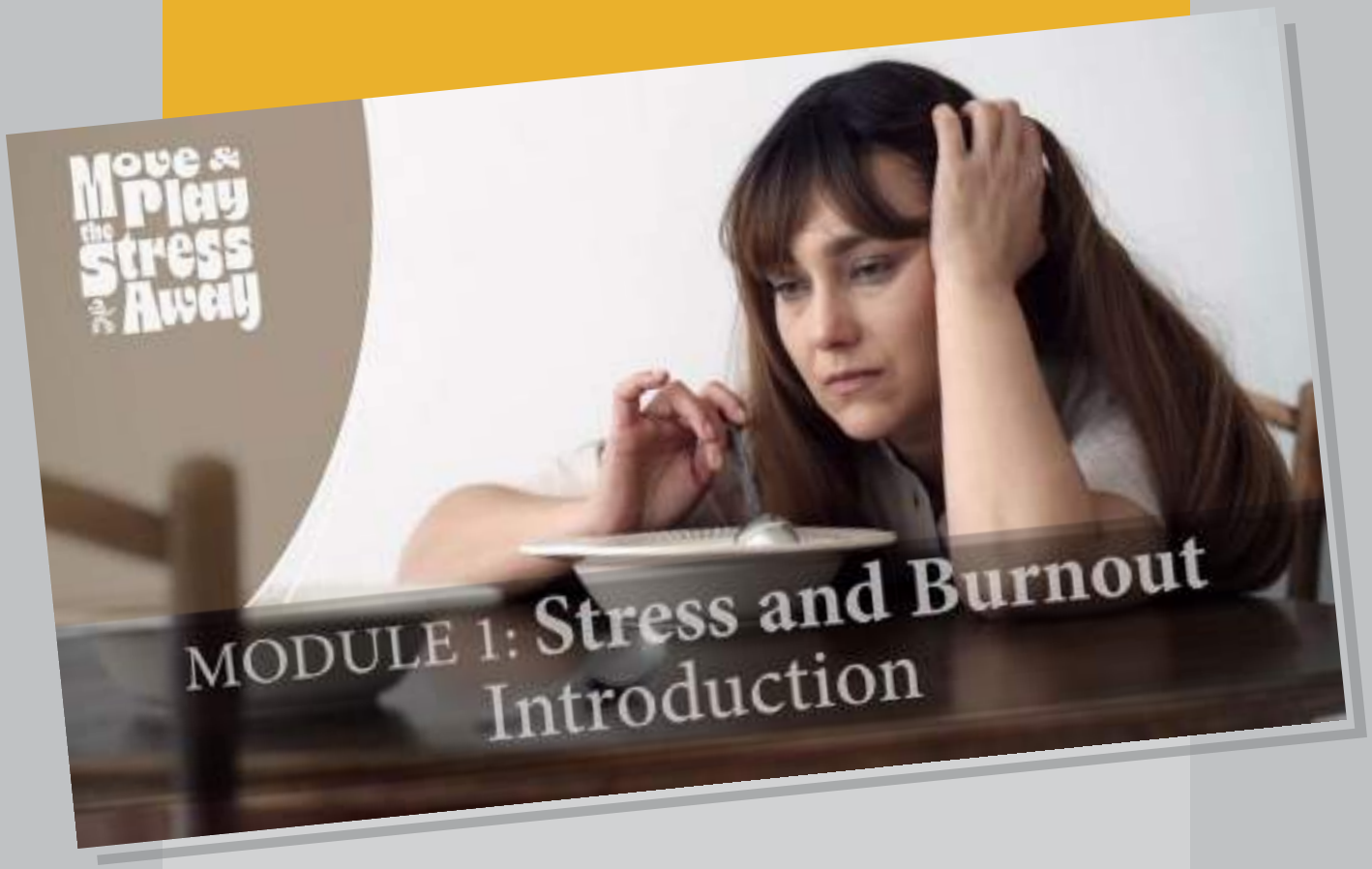
Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



This introductory video welcomes you to the course and sets the stage for the topics to be discussed.

Stress and Burnout



This is an introductory video of the module.

Understanding Stress

Hello, and welcome to the "Move and Play the Stress Away" course! At the beginning of our journey, we are discussing a topic that's probably all too familiar: stress. It's a word we use daily, but what does it really mean, and how does it affect us, especially in demanding professions like teaching?

The fast-paced world we live in, the constant flood of information, and the pressure to excel in our various roles—whether as educators, partners, parents, or friends—all contribute to the stress we feel. This course is about getting intentional with our stress management and finding effective ways to cope. We'll start by looking at the science behind stress and then explore some practical ways to connect with nature to find relief.

The Scientific Definition of Stress

According to Hans Selye's pioneering work, stress is the process by which an environmental event or stimulus compels an individual to change their behaviour. We can think of it as your body's non-specific response to any demand. The key insight from researchers like Thoits is that stress is often triggered by changes that are sudden, undesirable, uncontrollable, and outside of our normal routine. This certainly sounds familiar to anyone working in a dynamic school environment, where no two days are ever the same.

We now know that managing stress and coping with it is one of the biggest challenges we face. However, it's also a learning process. As we develop our coping skills, we build up a kind of toolbox of behavioural strategies that can help us handle future stressors more effectively. We can think of it as building your resilience muscles (Pikó, 2002).

What happens in our body, when we are stressed?

When our brains perceive a threat, the sympathetic nervous system activates the fight-or-flight response. This is an ancient, hardwired survival mechanism. Hormones like cortisol and adrenaline flood the body, causing an immediate cascade of physical changes: your heart rate and blood pressure soar, breathing becomes rapid, and muscles tense up. Your senses become hyper-aware, and blood rushes to your limbs to prepare you to either confront the threat or run away from it. This is a very useful response if you are facing a truly dangerous situation, but it's not so helpful when the "threat" is a looming deadline or a difficult conversation.

This is where the problem lies. In modern life, we often face psychological rather than physical threats, but our bodies react the same way. If this state of high alert is prolonged due to chronic stress, it can lead to negative health consequences. The body is designed for this response to be temporary, not a constant state.

The parasympathetic nervous system is the counterbalance. It's often called the "rest and digest" system. It works to calm the body down after the threat has passed, bringing your heart rate and blood pressure back to normal, relaxing your muscles, and allowing your body to recover and restore itself.

Effective stress management is about learning how to deliberately activate this parasympathetic system. By understanding this internal push-and-pull, we can gain control over our stress responses and prevent our bodies from being stuck in a perpetual state of "fight-or-flight."

Why Is Effective Stress Management So Crucial?

Why should we dedicate time, energy, and even money to managing stress? Because it pays off in spades. Psychologist Philip Zimbardo (2018) argues that effective coping strategies can significantly reduce the harmful effects of stress on our health. He defines healthy coping as an action that either lessens or completely eliminates the source of stress.

Over time, this constant state of high alert can lead to serious health issues. Chronic stress can suppress your immune system, making you more susceptible to illnesses. It can also contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, and digestive problems. Emotionally, it can lead to anxiety, irritability, depression, and even burnout—a state of physical and emotional exhaustion.

Burnout is particularly relevant for teachers. It's not just feeling tired; it's a deep sense of cynicism, a loss of enthusiasm for your work, and a feeling of being ineffective. It often arises when the demands of the job exceed your resources, leaving you feeling helpless and drained.

In this module, we will continue to learn more about burnout—but first, let's learn something about coping with stress: practical exercises on how to ground ourselves, tune into our bodies and breath into space. The following videos are about these.

Resources:

- *Bach, É. (2020). Természetkapcsolat – otthonról (Connecting with Nature – from Home). Mindennapi Pszichológia. Retrieved July 6, 2025, from https://mipszi.hu/cikk/201130-termeszetkapcsolat-otthonrol.*
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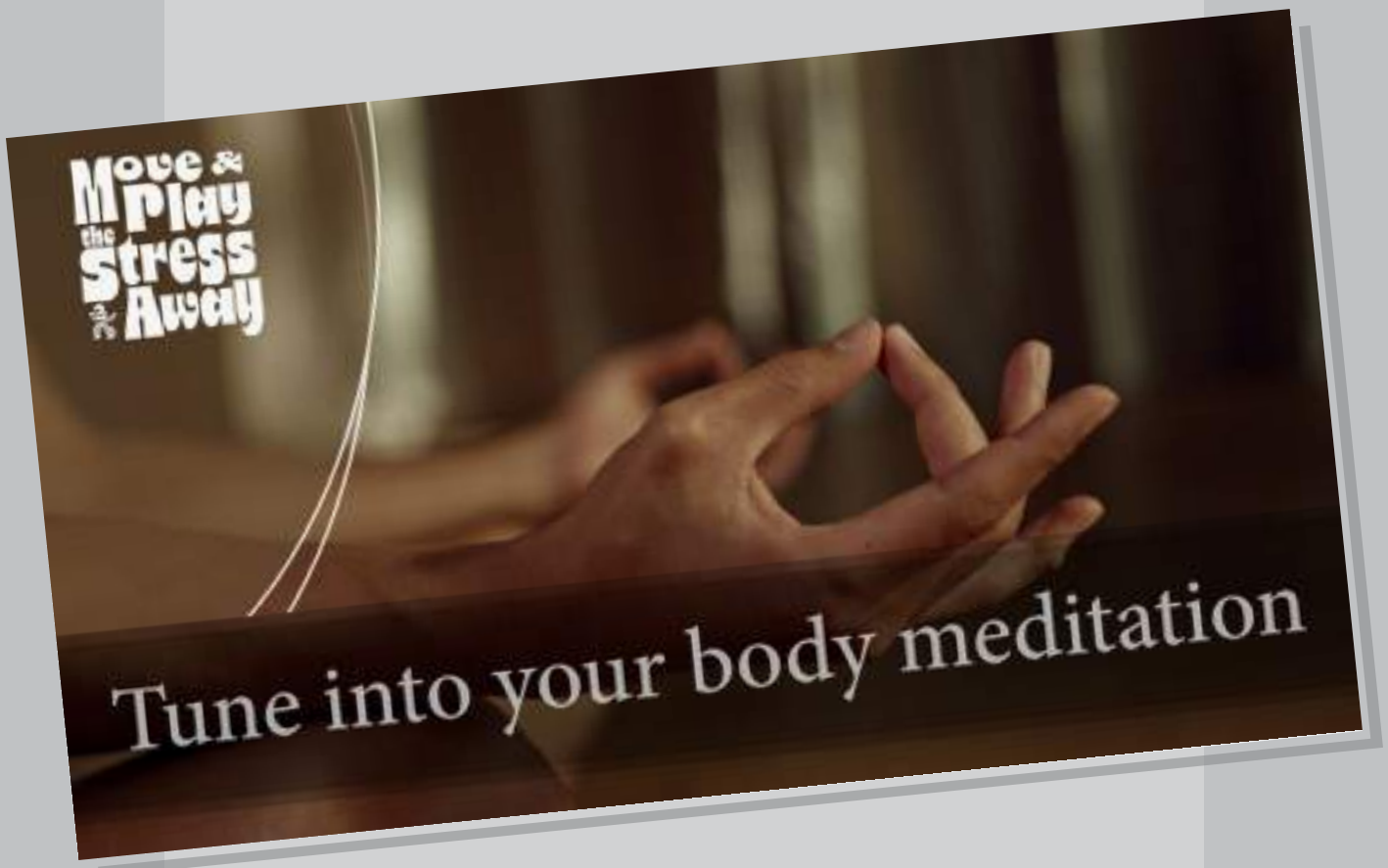
- *Selye, H. (1956). The Stress of Life. McGraw-Hill.*
- *Thoits, P. A. (1995). Stress, Coping, and Social Support Processes: Where Are We and Where Should We Go?. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 36(Extra Issue), 53–79.*
- *Zimbardo, P., Johnson, R., & McCann, V. (2018). Pszichológia mindenkinek 4. Zavarok, terápiák, stressz, stratégiák (The equivalent English title would be: Psychology for Everyone 4. Disorders, Therapies, Stress, Strategies). Libri Könyvkiadó Kft.*

Following the discussion on stress, this video introduces the concept of grounding. It serves as a practical exercise to anchor yourself in the present moment.

This video offers further instruction on how to practice grounding techniques. These exercises are presented as a way to manage overwhelming feelings associated with stress and burnout.



This is a practical exercise, a meditation about tuning into our own bodies.

A practical exercise about breathing.

Burnout Syndrome

In our previous article, we dove into the world of stress. Now, we're tackling a topic that often follows chronic, unmanaged stress: burnout. While it might feel like a buzzword, burnout is a very real, scientifically recognized syndrome. It's a state of profound exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced effectiveness that can creep up on anyone, especially in a demanding profession like teaching.

According to the ICD-11 (the International Classification of Diseases), burnout is described as "a syndrome stemming from chronic job stress that has not been successfully managed." This definition gives us three key characteristics:

1. **Feelings of exhaustion:** This isn't just being tired after a long day; it's a profound and persistent lack of energy.

2. **Increased psychological distance from work or feelings of work-related negativity/cynicism:** You may feel detached from your job, viewing it with a sense of dread or indifference.

3. **Decreased work effectiveness:** You feel less and less capable of performing your job well, and your performance may actually decline.

The Stages of Burnout

Burnout isn't an overnight phenomenon; it's a gradual process. The Edelwitch and Brodsky model (Stock, 2010) offers a clear look at its different phases, which you may find all too familiar.

1. **Idealistic Enthusiasm:** This is where many of us start. A novice worker is full of enthusiasm, has unrealistic expectations, and voluntarily works overtime. Your work feels fulfilling, and you strongly identify with your profession, often neglecting personal life and hobbies.

2. **Stagnation:** The initial sparkle fades. You start to see the limitations of your profession and realize that not all your ideals can be fulfilled. Your focus shifts back to your personal needs and hobbies.

3. **Frustration:** This is a critical turning point. You begin to question the effectiveness and

meaning of your work. Repeated encounters with uncooperative students, parents, and bureaucratic obstacles can feel overwhelming. You may start to have disputes with colleagues or supervisors, and emotional and physical difficulties begin to appear.

4. **Apathy:** Following prolonged frustration, apathy sets in. Your work becomes nothing more than a source of income. You do only what is absolutely necessary, reject new ideas, avoid conversations with coworkers, and refuse to work overtime. You may also start to react with cynicism and reluctance towards your students and their parents, as a defense mechanism.

Recognizing the Signs: A Quick Self-Check

From these stages, you can probably see that burnout is characterized by specific behaviors and attitudes. To help you spot the warning signs in yourself, here's a quick screening tool. If you answer "yes" to most of these questions, you may be experiencing some of the early signs of burnout.

- I get tired quickly and don't sleep well.
- I feel exhausted and have no energy.
- I don't have the energy or desire to continue learning.
- I feel helpless and lack purpose.
- I don't enjoy my work as much as I used to.
- I go to work with a sense of resistance.
- I put off work until later.
- I can't enjoy things like I used to.
- I shut down and don't seek out contact with colleagues.
- I feel that I react cynically and reluctantly to both my students and their parents.
- I get angry more easily than before.
- I blame failures in teaching on my pupils.
- I feel I'm not doing my job well and I'm not good enough for it.

How to go on?

In this module, we've explored the foundations of burnout, but before we dive deeper into the topic, let's turn our attention to some practical tools for building resilience. In our last video, we tried out grounding, a simple but powerful technique to anchor yourself in the present moment and manage overwhelming feelings, also when we feel burned out.

Building on our grounding practice, our next article will introduce another way to connect with the present: barefoot walking. It's not just about getting back to nature; it's a way to reconnect with our bodies and senses, which is a powerful countermeasure to the detachment, which is the main symptome of burnout.

Sources:

➔ *Figure 1.: BS of teachers CZ (retrieved: https://nevypustdusi.cz/2019/09/09/syndrom-vyhoreni-u-ucitelu/)*

Reference:

➔ *Stock, C. (2010). Syndrom vyhoření a jak jej zvládnout (Natalie VRAJOVÁ (překladatel). Grada publishing.*

➔ *www: https://nevypustdusi.cz/2019/09/09/syndrom-vyhoreni-u-ucitelu/*

➔ *ICD-11: https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon*

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Barefoot walking: advantages, disadvantages and exercises to strengthen the foot

Barefoot walking means walking or being without shoes. In some cultures, barefoot walking is a normal part of everyday life. For example, in parts of Asia and Africa, people often walk barefoot, which is considered a natural and healthy way to move. In Western countries, barefoot walking is becoming increasingly popular due to a growing interest in natural and holistic approaches to health.

Barefoot walking is gaining popularity due to its many health benefits. One of the main benefits is the natural position of the foot, which helps prevent deformities and pain. When we walk barefoot, our feet can assume a natural position, which is important for proper foot function. Footwear often restricts foot movement and can lead to various deformities such as flat feet or bunions.

Walking barefoot also strengthens the muscles, tendons and ligaments in the feet. Without the support of shoes, muscles are more involved, which can lead to better stability and balance. Strong leg muscles are key to preventing injuries and improving overall mobility. Additionally, when we walk barefoot, our feet directly sense the surface, which improves sensory perception and overall body balance. This sensory experience can be very pleasurable and can help us better perceive our surroundings.

Another benefit of barefoot walking is improved blood circulation to the feet and overall circulation. When we walk without shoes, our feet have to work harder, which improves blood flow and can help prevent circulation problems such as varicose veins or swollen feet. Barefoot walking can also contribute to better posture. When we walk barefoot, we need to engage the muscles in our legs and torso more, which can lead to better posture and overall balance.

On the other hand, barefoot walking has its disadvantages. Walking on hard or uneven surfaces can cause injury or pain. Without the protection of shoes, our feet are at risk of injuries such as cuts, abrasions or blisters. It can also be problematic for people with certain health problems such as flat feet or plantar fasciitis. These people may need the special support that footwear provides.

Barefoot walking can be a great way to improve foot health if done with care and on appropriate surfaces. It is important to start slowly and gradually increase the amount of time you spend barefoot so that your feet can get used to the new way of walking. If you have health problems or pain, it is always

a good idea to consult a professional before starting barefoot walking.

In addition to the health benefits, barefoot walking can also bring a sense of freedom and connection with nature. Walking barefoot on grass, sand or soft forest floor can be very pleasant and relaxing. Many people enjoy feeling more connected to their surroundings and can better feel the natural surfaces beneath their feet.

If you decide to start barefoot walking, it is important to choose a suitable environment. Soft and flat surfaces, such as grass or sand, are ideal for getting started. Avoid hard and uneven surfaces that can cause injury. It's also a good idea to start with short walks and gradually increase the amount of time you spend barefoot.

You can try the following exercises to strengthen the ball of the foot:

- **Toe Lift:** Sit down and lift all your toes as high as possible. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 10 times. This exercise strengthens the muscles in the front of the foot and improves toe mobility.

- **Rolling the ball:** Use a small ball (such as a tennis ball) and roll it under the foot for 2-3 minutes. This exercise helps to release tension in the feet and improves blood circulation.

- **Walking on tiptoes:** Walking on tiptoes for 1-2 minutes strengthens the muscles in the feet and calves. This exercise is great for improving balance and stability.

- **Heel Lift:** Stand on a flat surface and lift your heels as high as possible. Hold for 5 seconds and then slowly lower back down. Repeat 10 times. This exercise strengthens the muscles in the calves and improves ankle stability.

- **Collecting objects with your toes:** Place small objects, such as pebbles or marbles, on the floor and try to collect them with your toes. This exercise strengthens the muscles in the toes and improves their mobility.

- **Stretch the ball of your foot:** Sit down and stretch your legs out in front of you. Grasp your toes and gently pull them towards you. Hold for 15-20 seconds and repeat 3 times. This exercise helps to release tension in the feet and improves their flexibility.

Barefoot walking can also be a great complement to other forms of exercise. You can combine it with yoga, pilates or other activities that strengthen and stretch your leg muscles. In this way, you can achieve a comprehensive improvement in foot health and overall mobility.

In conclusion, a mention of barefoot shoes has many advantages, but also some disadvantages. It is important to approach it with caution and gradually increase the amount of time you spend barefoot. If you have health problems or pain, it is always a good idea to consult a specialist. With the right approach, barefoot walking can bring many health benefits and improve your overall well-being.

Let's see how it works – in our last video of this module. Enjoy.

Sources:

- *Mrhač, D. (2016), Proč je z zdravé chodit naboso. Meduňka, 2016, 2, p. 18–20.*
- *http://www.barefooting.eu/*
- *https://www.bosaturistika.cz/*
- *https://footandanklespec.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-walking-barefoot/*
- *https://www.thehealthy.com/foot-care/walking-barefoot/*
- *https://www.healthline.com/health/walking-barefoot*
- *https://web.archive.org/web/20160411122622/http://www.lideazeme.cz/clanek/vylet-pro-13-svalu-a-26-kosti*
- *https://www.wellandgood.com/benefits-of-walking-barefoot/*

This video demonstrates the practice of barefoot walking, allowing you to see how it works as a practical exercise.

My Stressors/My Sources

Figure Technique: Stressors and Resources in the Work of a Teacher

This adapted technique helps teachers visually map the specific stressors they face in the classroom and at school and recognize where they can draw energy and support for their work.

You will need

- A sheet of A4 paper (or flipchart paper)
- Pencil and markers (use different colours – e.g., red/black for stressors, green/blue for resources)

Instructions

1. Draw a Figure (The Teacher)

In the centre of the paper, draw a simple stick figure representing you in your role as a teacher (you may add a book, chalkboard, or any symbol of your profession).

2. Identify Work-Related Stressors (Negative influences)

- Focus specifically on situations, people, or tasks that cause you tension, frustration, or exhaustion in connection with your work.
- Placement: Draw or write these outside the stick figure, as if they were pressing inward.

Use red or dark colours.

Examples of common teacher stressors:

- Administrative Tasks: "Endless paperwork," "filling in spreadsheets," "long staff meetings."
- Student Relationships: "Classroom misbehaviour," "noise and shouting," "lack of motivation," "bullying."
- Relationships with Parents: "Complaints," "demanding parents," "messages/emails in the evening."
- Relationships with Colleagues/Management: "Tension in the staffroom," "lack of support from leadership," "poor organization."
- Working Conditions: "Low salary," "overcrowded classes," "poor classroom equipment."
- Personal Strain: "Preparing lessons on weekends," "burnout symptoms," "working overtime."

3. Identify Work-Related Resources and Support (Positive influences)

- Now think about what gives you energy, joy, satisfaction, or emotional support in your work.

- Placement: Draw or write these closes to the figure, as if they were nurturing or protecting it.

Use green, blue, or other positive colours.

Examples of teacher resources:

- Relationships: "A supportive colleague," "friendly staffroom environment," "understanding leadership," "partner/family support."

- Joy in Teaching: "Seeing student progress," "moments of understanding ('aha!' moments)," "positive feedback from students."

- Activities: "Hobbies after work," "exercise/sport," "time to read/relax," "good sleep."

- Professional Resources: "Useful teaching materials," "working teaching aids," "supervision/coaching," "holidays/breaks."

4. Reflection and Action Steps

- Look at the map: Does your teacher figure seem overwhelmed with red arrows and only a few green ones?

- Strengthen your resources: Which resource can you actively use or enhance this week?
  Example: "I'll schedule a coffee break with the colleague who always cheers me up."

- Reduce stressors: Is there any stressor you can realistically influence or delegate?
  Example: "I will talk to the administration about sharing some of the paperwork load."

This technique is an excellent first step in preventing burnout and helps teachers take active control of their mental well-being in a demanding work environment.

1) – STRESSFUL MOMENTS/EVENTS – OUTSIDE OF THE FIGURE

List all activities/moments/events that drain you, take your energy, do not please you, stress you at work....

- What stresses do you encounter most often?
- What stresses your colleagues?

2) + SOURCES AT WORK – INSIDE OF FIGURE

List all the activities, moments, or events at work that recharge you, give you energy, bring you pleasure, or make you feel satisfied.

- What energises your colleagues?

3) CIRCLE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT ONES FROM THE AREA IN QUESTION

Anti-stress suitcase

The aim of the activity is to identify and map the positive and negative sides of the tools that a person uses to deal with stress. We find out what we do against stress, what coping strategies we use. We are aware of our own handling of stressful situations.

Group size

We can do the activity as our own self-reflection, but it is interesting and appropriate to do the activity as group work for a group of 4-10 people and share the results with all group members. It should always be a group where there is an atmosphere of mutual trust, safety and openness.

Cooperation takes place in pairs or threes.

Time:

It depends on you for your own reflections.

Work in pairs/threes within 30 minutes. Subsequent presentation and discussion with the help of flip-chart 15-20 minutes.

Gadgets:

Sheet of paper, pencil, colored markers. The tools can be painted or you can prepare and print paper with pictures of the tools and the case.

When working in a group, a larger sheet of paper (flipchart) is suitable. Each pair/triple in the group gets 1 printed worksheet.

1 roll of paper suitable for hanging on a flip chart and a set of colored markers for each air/triple.

Flip chart.

Rating:

Self-reflection lay OR

The activity is led/moderated by a lecturer/coach/pedagogue who has previous experience in leading self-discovery and development activities for adults.

Procedure:

Option A, individual reflection:

Draw a picture of a toolbox on a piece of paper, draw or write 5 work tools for stress management in the box, each of which has a symbolic meaning:

Screwdriver (unscrews and screws the problem = used to analyze problems)

Libra (helps keep life balanced)

Saw (allows you to cut off a certain part or divide the whole into smaller parts)

Hammer (valve of energy, realization of power or breaking the whole into parts)

Flashlight (brings light to the problem, we can "shine a light on something", get information)

Try to define what activities, practices, activities in your life work as a given tool against stress. For example, a flashlight is conversations with friends, literature, the Internet, time for distance, ... Write everything down, draw it in your suitcase.

Besides self-awareness, it is useful to compare your suitcase with those of colleagues, to inspire each other.

Variation Option B/ group work:

The worksheet includes a picture of a stress rescue kit (empty suitcase).

In addition, there are a total of 10 tools:

1. screwdriver

2. a spirit level
3. saw
4. hammer
5. flashlight
6. scissors
7. file
8. tape measure
9. axe
10. glue

Divide the group into pairs or trios.

The task of each pair/triplet is to choose a total of 3-5 tools they find depicted in the worksheet and then try to map them:

1) what activities, actions and practices in their lives work as that selected tool to combat stress,

2) what activities and practices in their lives, on the other hand, exacerbate stress while functioning as that selected tool against stress.

Pairs/triplets first draw a stress rescue kit on a paper roll (following the pattern on the worksheet). They will use as much of the space on the paper roll as possible - they will then draw the individual tools into the rescue kit.

The pictograms/images of the tools included in the toolkit will be accompanied by a description of the specific positive stress-fighting activities and negative stress-inducing activities that belong to the tool (briefly, in bullet points) - see examples 1 and 2 below.

Example 1:

Selected tool: glue

Things can be cemented, put together. This can, for example, represent

(a list of speeches that challenge all members of the group):

- a common conversation
- joint activities
- conflict resolution skills
- improving group relations

But sometimes one also tends to "glue" things too much, taking responsibility for other people and their problems. This in turn increases stress. This can manifest itself, for example, in the way that a person (a list of speeches that challenge all group members):

- solves their difficulties for others
- tries to enter into conflicts that do not directly concern him or her

Example 2:

The chosen tool: the axe.

We can chop things up. In life, for example, this is a skill

(a list of speeches that challenge all members of a group):

- make a decision
- enforce a decision.
- speak your mind openly

But sometimes we can also come to a hasty decision or action. This in turn increases stress. This can manifest as (a list of speeches that challenge all members of the group):

- sudden cancellation of an activity
- a quick argument
- talking faster than thinking

When the work is finished, the pairs/trios share with the whole group:

1) what tools they chose
2) what activities/examples they gave.

A pre-determined (by agreement of all) member of the pair/triplet presents the results to the group, attaching the completed paper roll to a flip-chart.

All group members can comment on each pair/trio's presentation, i.e. provide feedback on the positive and negative strategies described.

Variants, comments:

1) Variation of the activity.

2) The activity can be used repeatedly over time - if possible.

How are your comments different on the pictures from last week's comments? Do you choose certain tools more often? Do you still solve the same problems, or are you solving new problems?

References:

➔ *PAVLAS MARTANOVÁ, V. a SPĚVÁKOVÁ, K. (2020). Syndrom vyhoření v pedagogické profesi – vzdělávací modul N10. Společné vzdělávání a podpora škol krok za krokem. Implementace akčního plánu inkluzivního vzdělávání – metodická podpora (APIV A). NPI ČR, Praha.*

Balance Wheel

Rules:

1. **What do you associate with the word mental hygiene?**

   - What other areas in your life have a direct impact on your mental and physical health?

   - Choose 8 areas (maybe more) to match with each piece of the wheel

Retrieved from: **https://annemarie.brambleberry.com/blog/2017/9/6/life-balance-wheel**

Basic categories: example in the wheel above OR

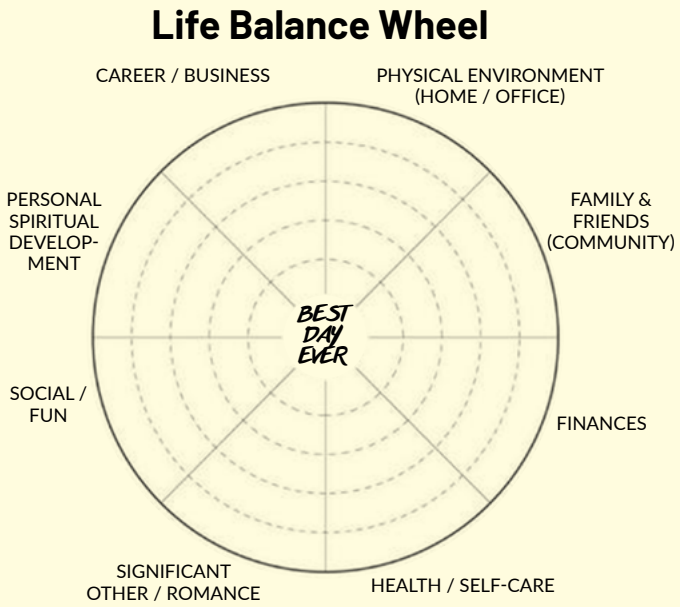
- Relationships
- Sleep
- Diet
- Physical activity
- Work

2. **Scale each category according to how you feel about it (1= not satisfied at all, 10= everything is absolutely fine)**
   Q: How satisfied do you feel in the last (month/year) ½ year in each area? Colour

3. **How does your balance wheel affect you? Intuitively, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? (Wheel - sharing)**

4. **Choose one area that you perceive as a problem, long term, that you would like to work on.**

5. **Look at the value you have assigned to it.**



6. **From 4 to 5 Try a specific, tangible goal/change e.g. Movement - I'll go to yoga on Tuesdays and Thursdays**

7. **Scale 1-10: Q: How ready am I to make this change? If less than 8, we need to reduce/adjust the goal**

8. **Scale 1-10: Q How confident am I that I will make the change? If it is again less than 8, we need to reformulate**

9. **Sharing goals**

10. **What did you realize during the balance wheel?**

Printed balance wheels.
Length: approx. 1 hour

The Two Curtain Method

Instructions for the tool: The two curtain method
Characteristics:

In practice, it often happens that the teacher takes work home. Or, conversely, family problems Interfere with the teacher's duties at school. The two curtains method is used to separate these two spheres and to symbolically "draw the curtain" when the teacher leaves school. Similarly, When he leaves home, he is to leave his family and personal problems behind a symbolic Curtain.

Form of performance:

Individual pencil-and-paper method, suitable for the educator for his personal growth.

Time: Fifteen to thirty minutes

Procedure:

In the following list (see worksheet on the next two pages), check off the items that represent problems you don't want to bring home from school. These are things that weigh you down, bother you, or simply don't make you happy, but you will deal with them when you enter the school building the next day. Now symbolically pull the curtain back on them. You can print out the following list, and if you wish, you can post it

After crossing it out, you can symbolically "tear it up" using your imagination, or imagine that the problem is being carried away by water, etc.

Variants, comments:

Don't persist in the stereotype. Over time, vary the procedure using the "Two Nails" method. Imagine that you have "hung on a nail" all your work and personal worries.

That is, when you leave the workplace, you "hang up" your work problems. Then, when you leave home, you "hang family problems".

Success factors:

The more problems you can hang on a nail, pull back the curtain, the better.

BUT your problems must be reflected upon. We recommend that you make a list of all the difficulties that you have not resolved and are unable to displace.

They can also be arranged from the most difficult to the most marginal. Then one pull of the curtain and they should all "hide behind the curtain". They have no chance of escaping where they don't belong. Time will only be devoted to these problems when you and we want it. Allocate them only a certain limited space and do not allow them to cross it.

Risks:

Beware of excessive mental preoccupation with your own concerns. Sometimes it is good to detach from them towards helping another. The method should not lead to egotism and excessive preoccupation with one's own person.

TOOL: TWO CURTAIN METHOD

Name the problems you want to leave behind and solve only at the right time in the right place. Check off the items in the list one by one.

CURTAIN 1

Pulling back the curtain on work problems
It bothers me:

- Disruption of communication between colleagues
- my age, which stresses me out because I have the subjective feeling that I am not up to par with the younger generation of teachers
- my age, which is getting further and further away from the age of the pupils every year
- my lack of psychological training
- the public's poor assessment of my work
- the feeling that I am not able to satisfy pupils, colleagues, superiors, parents
- the impossibility of maintaining discipline in the classroom
- unfair criticism from supervisors and/or parents
- not being given adequate conditions by my superiors to make my work with children successful
- less time for self-education
- constantly adapting to new developments at school
- pupils' failures and unsatisfactory results
- spending more time with children than with adults, not being able to share my worries and joys
- small classroom space
- insufficient lighting in the classrooms
- less rest and free time, although I try not to bring work home
- the fact that I am back on the payroll with a salary that does not correspond to the energy spent
- being subjected to an agenda that I have to fill in every day and with which I disagree
- the lack of rest to recover
- teaching in a classroom with a large number of children
- teaching in a classroom with different levels of pupils
- the poor level of cooperation between parents and the school
- that pupils do not have appropriate attitudes towards schoolwork
- not having enough teaching aids and supplies in the classrooms
- the fact that today's work was again associated with chaos and time-limited tasks
- discovering problems with my students' motivation
- Lack of capacity (either time or space) for group work of pupils

Write other problems in the space provided:

CURTAIN 2

Pulling back the curtain on family problems

In the space provided, write down factors in your personal and family life that might interfere with your work at the workplace. Whether these are personal and family relationships, financial and material conditions, relationships with neighbours, caring for pets, contact with extended family, friends, spending leisure time, planning and achieving goals in personal and family life, looking after your own and family members' health, personal and family successes/failures, etc.

I mind:

Connecting with our body

This is an introductory video for the module, setting the stage for the topics to be covered.

The Embodied Mind

In our daily language, we often speak of a „broken heart," „shouldering a burden," or having a „gut feeling". These phrases point to a profound truth we intuitively understand yet often forget in our busy lives: the deep and inseparable connection between our minds and our bodies. In this module we would like to explore the concept of embodiment and offer a pathway to reconnect with our whole selves.

Overcoming an Artificial Divide

For centuries, a prominent trend in Western thought has been to separate the mind and the body. In this dualistic ("Cartesian") view, the body, with its „natural" instincts, was often framed as the source of problems or undesirable actions. Many of the so-called „deadly sins," such as gluttony or sloth, were considered body-driven failings. The mind, in contrast, was elevated as our rational, creative, and „higher" self.

However, this separation is a misleading oversimplification. Modern neuroscience and contemplative practices alike confirm that our mind is not an isolated commander in our skull. Instead, our consciousness is embodied: it is formed by, rooted in, and inseparable from our bodily experiences. As the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio famously argued, rational thought is not possible without the input of our emotions and the body's physical signals. To reconnect with ourselves and the world, the first step is to reconnect with the nature that we inherently are.

The Wisdom of an Embodied Experience

Being embodied means that everything happening within our bodies has a direct impact on how we feel, think, and perceive the world. Sometimes this is obvious; for example, when we are sick, we often feel more emotionally vulnerable or lonely. At other times, the connection is more subtle, especially when we believe we are engaged in purely „mental" work like teaching or writing an article. Yet even then, our physical state matters immensely. Research shows that hunger, thirst, and fatigue largely affect how we think and form memories.

While countless processes occur in our bodies without reaching our conscious awareness, turning our attention toward them is a powerful act. Developing this body consciousness is a foundational step toward better understanding our own behaviours and reconnecting with our authentic selves. We can

This video demonstrates a simple “tapping” exercise, which is a powerful bodywork practice designed to help you get connected with your body.

begin this process simply by standing up and slowly and lightly "tapping" through our body – as you will see in the next video.

This simple act is the beginning of many powerful bodywork practices. We can also cultivate this awareness in more active ways—through mindful walking, dancing, or exercise—so long as the primary intention is to focus on the sensations within our bodies. For those wishing to go deeper, numerous established methods like the Feldenkrais Method, Body-Mind Centering, or various dance and movement therapies offer structured pathways to this connection – we will talk about them later.

Embodiment as a Pathway to Resilience

Understanding the concept of embodiment is the key to building resilience. Borrowed from system science, resilience describes the ability of a system to connect and interact with its environment, adapting as needed to achieve a positive outcome while maintaining its core structure and integrity.

For a person, resilience is the ability to connect to the physical and social environment and adapt to its challenges, all while staying perfectly connected with oneself in body and mind. The more resilient you are, the more you can adapt to life's stressors without losing your center. A non-resilient person, by contrast, may feel they fall apart in a time of crisis. By cultivating a conscious connection to our embodied selves, we build the foundation of this essential strength, allowing us to navigate the complexities of life with greater stability and grace.

In this module we are going to explore some of these ideas in more detail – but before that let's get up and get connected with our body. We are giving you help in that in our next video.

Sources:

- *Damasio, Antonio R. Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain. Penguin Books, 2005.*
- *Descartes, René. Meditations on First Philosophy. 1641.*
- *Porges, Stephen W. The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-regulation. W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.*
- *Franzini, E., Magnano, F., Purita, A., Rossi, A., Gojšić, J., Hudec, G., Ratz, J., Turoczi, L., Suhajda E. V., Vastag Zs. (2018). Restoring Resilience, Connecting to Nature and Self - Reference Frame. Rogers Személyközpontú Oktatásért Alapítvány. Downloadable: https://www.connat.eu/index.php/project-documents/category/5-reference-frame?download=1:reference-frame*
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What is Mindfulness?

With our tapping exercise, we already dove into the area of Mindfulness.

Mindfulness is an ancient practice and concept rooted in Eastern traditions, especially Buddhism, that has evolved into a widely recognized method for enhancing mental well-being and present-moment awareness in modern times. The term „mindfulness" derives from the Pali word sati, which means „moment to moment awareness" and „remembering to be aware" of what is happening in the present. Mindfulness was originally a significant element of Buddhist teachings related to the Noble Eightfold Path as a path to enlightenment by cultivating awareness to overcome greed, hatred, and delusion.

Historically, mindfulness dates back thousands of years, with early mentions in the Vedic texts of ancient Hinduism and significant development through Buddhist meditation practices such as Vipassanā and Zen (Zazen). The Buddhist tradition positioned sati as a key cognitive skill of attentional monitoring and regulation to remain fully aware of internal states like thoughts and feelings, as well as external sensory phenomena. This practice was seen as a method for self-actualization and liberation from suffering through clear comprehension of experience without clinging to desires or aversions.

In modern times, mindfulness has been secularized and adapted into Western contexts through programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) pioneered by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979. Mindfulness is now broadly defined as maintaining a moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, often cultivated through meditation but also applicable in everyday activities. It promotes focus, reduces stress, and fosters compassion toward oneself and others.

Experiencing mindfulness in everyday life can be simple and practical. Common approaches include:

- Starting the day with a mindful moment by sitting quietly, focusing on the breath, and setting an intention for the day.
- Mindful eating by truly savoring each bite, noticing smell, taste, and texture.
- Taking mindful pauses during daily routines to reconnect with present sensations and

thoughts rather than reacting automatically.

- Applying mindfulness in movement-based activities like walking or exercise by synchronizing breath and movement.

- Practicing mindful awareness even in stressful situations such as driving, using deep breathing and selfcompassion to manage emotional reactions.

These small practices integrate mindfulness into daily life, helping to decrease stress, improve concentration, and enrich the overall experience of living with a calm and aware mind.

In the following videos in the module, we discover some of these methods in more detail – let's practice mindfulness.

Resources:

➔ *Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life. New York, NY: Hyperion.*

➔ *Wikipedia. (2004, November 12). Mindfulness. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindfulness*

➔ *Positive Psychology. (2025, April 2). The History and Origins of Mindfulness. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/*

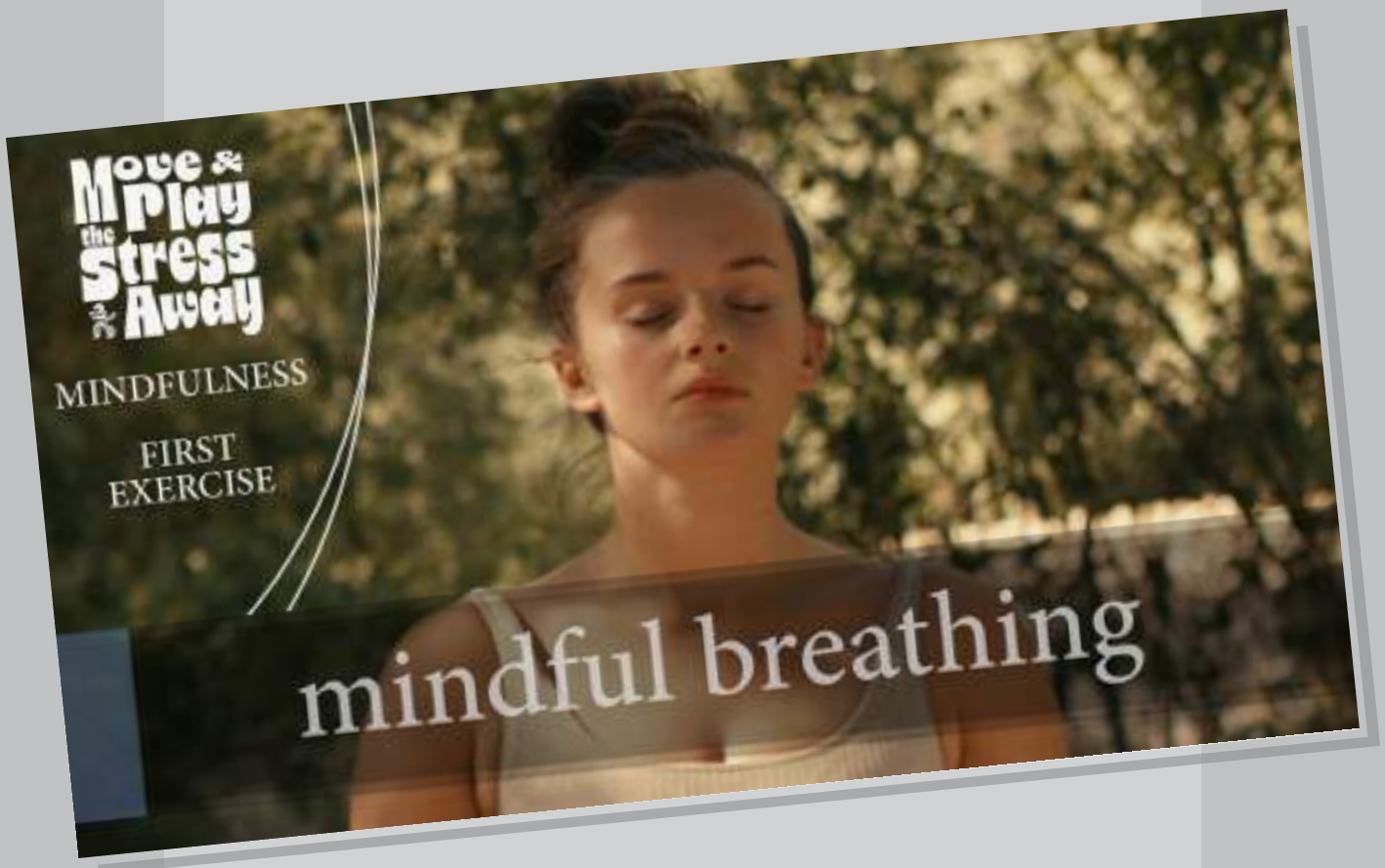
➔ *Mindful.org. (2025, March 23). 5 Simple Mindfulness Practices for Daily Life. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://www.mindful.org/take-a-mindful-moment-5-simple-practices-for-daily-life/*

➔ *PsychCentral. (2022, June 12). The History of Mindfulness in the USA and Its Impact on Our Lives. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://psychcentral.com/lib/a-brief-history-of-mindfulness-in-the-usa-and-its-impact-on-our-lives*

➔ *Mayo Clinic. (2022, October 10). Mindfulness Exercises. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/mindfulness-exercises/art-20046356*

➔ *Mindful.org. (2025, May 14). What Is Mindfulness?. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/*

This is an introductory video on the topic of mindfulness.

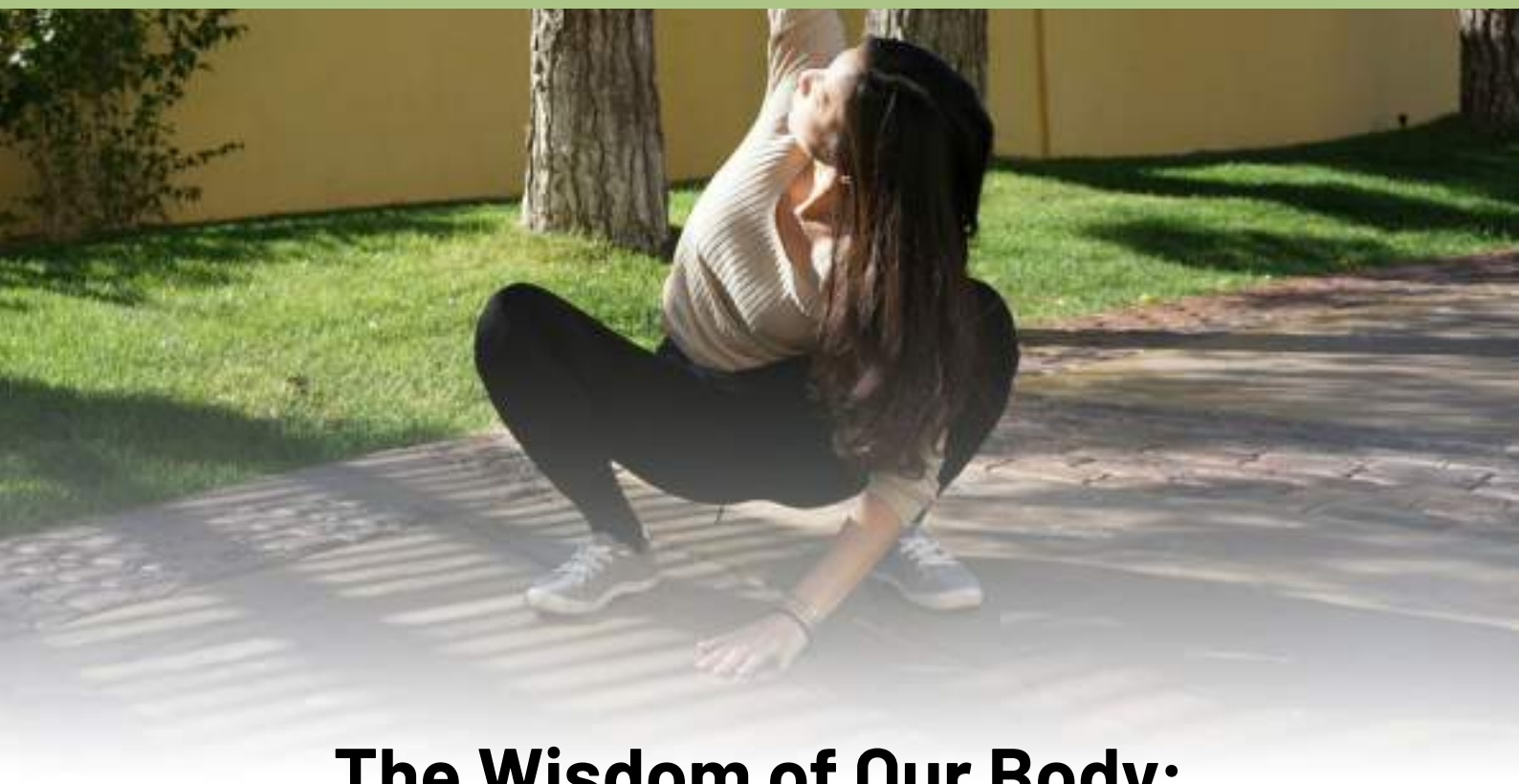


This video guides you through a simple breathing exercise to be performed in a comfortable spot in nature. The goal is to help you relax and refocus by paying attention to the gentle rise and fall of your chest as you breathe.

This video presents a “body scan” exercise, which can be done lying down in nature or indoors. The practice involves focusing sequentially on different parts of your body, from head to toe, to notice any sensations like pain, tension, warmth, or cold.

This video guides a walking meditation in nature, combining a breathing exercise with movement. The aim is to sync your steps with your breath while paying attention to your body's motion and the surrounding environment.

This video is a 5-minute guided meditation that helps you tune into your body and become aware of physical sensations. It prompts you to notice feelings like warmth, coolness, your heartbeat, and what your body is communicating to you.



The Wisdom of Our Body: The Felt Body and Dance

We already know, what embodiment and mindfulness is, but do we really understand, how it helps us reconnect and reduce stress?

In this process, a somatic approach is key. Soma, or in other words, the "felt body," is the inner, subjective experience of how we live in our body from the inside. This concept is fundamentally different from Physis, the "physical body" that we see and measure from the outside.

The essence of somatic practices is to find our way back to our Soma and reunite the body and mind. Somatic movement is an experiential form of learning that helps us recognize the subtle impulses and sensations that guide our daily movements and behavior. By becoming aware of our internal processes—for example, our breathing, the distribution of our weight, or the tension in our muscles—we enter into a deeper relationship with ourselves. This inner attention is the key to recognizing the physical signs of stress or mental fatigue before they become overwhelming. Thus, somatic movement is not just a physical exercise, but a kind of self-discovery journey through which we learn to read the messages sent by our body and respond to them.

Movement, and especially dance, is a gateway through which we can rediscover our body's wisdom. As Sabine Parzer, the founder of the Holistic Dance Institute, explained, dance and somatic movement in general are a way to reconnect with our body and our inner world. Our body and our feelings are closely connected. Emotions are not just abstract thoughts; they live and act within the body, whether in muscle tension, heartbeat, or breathing rhythm. This connection is two-way: feelings influence our movements and posture, but movement also affects our emotions. A simple movement can help release inner tension and give way to blocked energy. Movement improvisation, as the basis of somatic practices, allows the body to express itself freely beyond ingrained, habitual patterns. This freedom helps to release behavioral and emotional blocks and can provide new, creative responses to everyday challenges.

Somatic movement and dance go deeper than mere physical activity. Their goal is to embark on

a path of personal development with the help of movement, dance, and body awareness. The aim of somatic movement forms is personal development, not clinical therapy. It's a journey during which we get to know ourselves more deeply through the improvisation of movement and dance. During the dance, participants discover how their movements are connected to their emotions and how they can create new, positive patterns with the help of their body and mind.

The essence of the somatic movement approach is that it considers the human being as a whole: body, soul, and spirit. The resulting dance is not a pre-choreographed form of movement, but a free, improvisational process in which the dancer pays attention to their inner impulses and sensations. This kind of attention allows for the discovery of inner resources, creativity, and "somatic intelligence." Somatic intelligence, which is the recognition and application of our body's wisdom, is particularly important for teachers, as it helps them recognize and manage the early signs of burnout, maintain mental and physical health, and prevent the long-term negative effects of stress.

The somatic approach is an invitation to play and let go, where the joy of movement is the main goal. It doesn't matter how you move; what matters is that you move. As Sabine Parzer also said, our body knows exactly what it needs, and it's easiest to connect with it through movement. Somatic dance is not therapy, but it has a healing effect, as it helps us find our way back to our own inner resources and thus improve our quality of life.

… and when we are already talking about dance, we cannot avoid an important topic: touch, and touching. Let's see how we get from getting connected with our body to getting connected with others – and then also understand some biology behind it.

Resources:

- ➔ *If you would like to learn more about Sabine Parzer's work and the holistic dance she teaches, please visit the website of the Holistic Dance Institute: www.holistic-dance.at.*
- ➔ *You can find an interview with her from a previous Erasmus+ project here: https://joy-experience.eu/media/joy-handbook-en.pdf*

This video introduces the topic of touch as a form of connection and healing, leading into the subsequent article.

The Healing Touch

Now you see – our connections with other people are deeply rooted in a physical contact. We first formulate within our mother's womb in a continuous touch, and after that we develop further through our parents and relatives cuddling. Sometimes we feel that we would die without being touched by another person.

Do you know that it is literally so? At the beginning of the 20th century there was a research by Henry Dwight Chapin among orphanages in the USA, where he found that the infant mortality rate is extremely high for very young babies, although they got proper food and medical care. They called this phenomenon "marasmus" from a Greek word, meaning fading away. After looking for the reason it turned out that the main reason was the lack of staff time spent with children. When this changed, and children got at least some amount of cuddling, the rate of mortality radically dropped. (However marasmus as a condition also exists if no proper food is available for the child.)

There was another interesting, and befamed study, an examination of monkeys by Harry Harlow in the 50s. He gave the baby monkeys two artificial mothers: a soft, cloth one and a wire one. It turned out that monkey babies were spending time with and turning for safety to the soft mother even if the food came from the wire one.

We need our mother's, father's, lover's, other people's soft touch for our healthy development and for our feeling of safety. Developmental studies even underline how much physical touch and contact from our mothers are needed for the development of our mind and consciousness. However, new extensive research confirms the profound importance of touch for well-being across all ages. A comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of 137 studies (Packheiser et. al. 2024), encompassing nearly 13,000 individuals, revealed that touch interventions significantly promote mental and physical health.

For adults, touch is highly effective in reducing pain, feelings of depression, and anxiety. Newborns also benefit considerably, experiencing regulated cortisol levels and increased weight gain. While human-to-human touch offers superior mental health benefits compared to touch from objects or robots, the number of sessions is crucial for adults, leading to greater improvements in depression, anxiety, and pain. Interestingly, parental touch is more benefi-

cial for newborns, though familiarity of the toucher doesn't impact adult outcomes. Additionally, head touch appears especially advantageous, and unidirectional touch shows higher mental health benefits in adults. These findings underscore touch as a powerful and adaptable tool for enhancing health.

We feel touch through the borders of our body – our skin. Our skin, the largest of all our organs is also the most ancient one. All creatures have an outer border, and all of them use it for sensing. Even if we identify our other senses (like seeing, or hearing) easier and give them more importance, in reality the primary sensations are coming through our skin – the feeling of hot, cold, pressure, or even pain and irritation. Our skin contains several different neural endings to feel all these different senses.

We can even learn to communicate through our skins: there is the story of Helen Keller, who got deaf and blind before her second birthday. She was taught to communicate through tactile stimulation by her teacher, Anne Sullivan, who also deserved to be mentioned by name. Keller later earned a university degree, and became a famous writer and an activist.

Trauma can also be healed partly through touching. Those specialists working with traumatised people – veteran soldiers, abused women, adults with previous childhood abuse –, have found that talking and medicine itself will never take away the remnants of these traumas, while working with the body through touch – will (Van der Kolk, 2014, Levine, 1997, Mate, 2019).

Even without turning to history and science we do know how important it is to be hugged and touched, and we all seek these sensations in our connections. There are ancient forms of getting it even without a mother or lover around: through dance, massage, or close friendships. So let's use them.

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- *Henry Dwight Chapin, "Family vs. Institution," Survey 55 (January 15, 1926):485-488.*
- *Wikipedia: Harry Harlow https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Harlow*
- *Wikipedia: Helen Keller: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Keller*
- *Packheiser, J., Hartmann, H., Fredriksen, K., Gazzola, V., Keysers, C., & Michon, F. (2024). A systematic review and multivariate meta-analysis of the physical and mental health benefits of touch interventions. Nature Human Behaviour*
- *Van der Kolk, Bessel A.: The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma. New York: Penguin Books, 2014*
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- *Maté, Gabor. When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress. London: Vermilion, Random House UK, 2019.*

Somatic movement practices

Finally, in case you would like to learn more, dive more deeply into somatic practices, here is a list of different types of somatic movement practices. It's important to distinguish between methods used in therapy, and methods for everyday practice. In this article we present some of both, as a food for mind. Happy movement, happy dancing!

a) Therapeutic methods

There are different dance and movement therapy types. All of them built on developing our awareness of the body, dance and movement improvisation and their connection to self-reflection, re-writing of behavioural patterns and self-healing. They can be used in clinical therapy as well.

Among others the following dance therapies are available in Europe:

Psychodynamic dance and movement therapy:

It is mainly based on body-awareness and finding and analysing connections between our experiences of moving together and our relational patterns. The method was developed in Hungary, and it is among the rare group-based clinical dance therapies used. During a therapeutic session, participants share their emotions and what they come with, then after a longer (2-3 hours) of non-verbal structured movement process they also process all their emotions as well as interpretation.

➔ *More about it in Hungarian: www.mozgasterapia.net*

Integrated Expression- and Dance Therapy:

The key feature of this complex, interdisciplinary approach is that it uses multimodal expressive arts processes for self-knowledge, inner growth, personal development, trauma work and other therapeutic goals. This feature derives from the idea that expression has a healing power and we all have access to different ways, modalities of expressions. The core of our work is movement and dance, but IED uses the integrating effect of other ways of expression, such as music making, visual expression and drama, 'authentic movement', imagination, poetry, personal symbols and rituals and so on. The method is process oriented and helps one to find their self-healing potentials, hidden resources, and thus to improve the quality of their life. The process of creation and its meaning for its creator is more important than the aesthetic value of the end-product. IED works

in groups – while immersed in artistic activities, the participants encounter each other in a deep way. Working together, creating together, being together, feeling accepted and acknowledged. All this happens in a playful, joyful manner.

➔ *More about the method in English/Hungarian: IKT Association – IKT Egyesület*

Authentic movement:

Authentic Movement (AM) is a method originated from dance therapy used in holistic dance pedagogy and psychotherapy as well as in artistic processes. It offers insights and experiences into deep layers of the inner body (Soma) and psyche, new expressions and abilities for the physical body (Physis) and the explorations and integration of its interconnections.

➔ *More about it in English/Deutsch: METHODEN | Holistic Dance (holistic-dance.at)*

b) Non-therapeutic Somatic Methods

Contact Improvisation is a partner dance form based on the physical principles of touch, momentum, shared weight, and most quintessentially - following a shared point of contact. The form was founded in 1972 by Steve Paxton. Integrating his background as a modern dancer and his studies in the martial art form Aikido, Steve developed Contact Improvisation through explorations with his students and colleagues at the time. This dance practice explores the skills of falling, rolling, counterbalance, lifting using minimal effort, how to make ourselves light when being lifted, centering and breathing techniques, and responsiveness to our partners and surroundings.

Contact Improvisation is an honoring of every moment. There is a sweet surrendering that happens when our bodies stay faithful to what is happening now, and now... and NOW! One learns to recognize and differentiate subtle impulses in our movement choices and our partner's choices. We begin to decipher the cues that we give and receive which tell us when to lead or follow, when to go up, when to go down, where to touch, how to lift, when to slow down, and when to be still. In this form one learns to stay in integrity with each choice, never forcing, never rushing. When Body, Mind, and Spirit are united in their instinctive wisdom one finds ones-self at home in every moment expressing ones true nature. – Moti Zemelman

➔ *More in English: www.contactimprov.com*

Body-Mind Centering:

Body-Mind Centering® (BMCTM) is an integrated and embodied approach to movement, the body and consciousness. Developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, it is an experiential study based on the embodiment and application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical and developmental principles, utilizing movement, touch, voice and mind. Its uniqueness lies in the specificity with which each of the body systems can be personally embodied and integrated, the fundamental groundwork of developmental re-patterning, and the utilization of a body-based language to describe movement and body-mind relationships.

The study of BMCTM is a creative process in which embodiment of the material is explored in the context of self-discovery and openness. Each person is both the student and the subject matter and the underlying goal is to discover the ease that underlies transformation.

The Body-Mind Centering® approach has an almost unlimited number of areas of application. It is currently being used by people in movement, dance, yoga, bodywork, somatic studies, physical and occupational therapy, psychotherapy, child development, education, voice, music, art, meditation, athletics and other body-mind disciplines.

➔ *More: https://www.bodymindcentering.com/*

5 Rhythms

5Rhythms is a dynamic movement practice—a practice of being in your body—that ignites creativity, connection, and community. While a seemingly simple process, the 5Rhythms practice facilitates deep and unending explorations, moving the dancer beyond self-imposed limitations and isolation into new depths of creativity and connection.

During a 5rythm class, participants dance with their own emotions and improvisations supported by

different “rhythms”, types of music. The 5Rhythms – Flowing Staccato Chaos Lyrical Stillness® – are states of Being. They are a map to everywhere we want to go, on all planes of consciousness – inner and outer, forward and back, physical, emotional and intellectual. They are markers on the way back to a real self, a vulnerable, wild passionate, instinctive self.

➔ *More: https://www.5rhythms.com/*

Holistic Art Therapy

As a multimedia approach, it offers time and space in a protective setting for contact with pictorial media like painting, drawing, modeling, and natural materials as well as with the performing media like improvisation, theater, drama, poetry, photography, etc. As a result of experiencing very different materials, children often open themselves in a playful way, their conditions and emotions gradually finding expression as insights are gained. If one´s own creativity and the joy of participating in shaping things result in a wider scope of action, resources are recognized and devlopment becomes apparent. Careful therapeutic guidance, the autonomous taking of action right here and right now, the promotion of one’s own potential, and the strengths of one’s own capabilities lead to rewarding moments. Holistic art therapy does not battle symptoms, illness, or crises. It offers the rehabilitation and reconstruction of one’s creative and social being as well as creative action. It is available for children, adolescents, and parents either individually or in a group.

➔ *More: https://www.sterntalerhof.at/en/life-guidance/in-patient-care/holistic-art-therapy*

Arrival to Space and Body

This exercise is designed as a personal warm-up to develop a heightened awareness of your body and your immediate environment. It is a non-verbal practice intended to ground you in the "here and now".

Goal of the Exercise

The primary goal is to cultivate body awareness and develop emotional intelligence through mindful movement. By transitioning from exploring your external space to your internal, physical self, you create a foundation for deeper somatic work or a state of calm presence.

Instructions

This exercise can be performed in any open space where you can walk around freely. It should take about 25 minutes. You may find it helpful to have some instrumental, joyful music to play during the later stages of your movement exploration.

1. **Walk the Space**
   Begin by simply walking around the room at a comfortable, natural pace. There is no destination; the aim is to feel your body in motion within the space. Turn your attention to your feet. Feel, how your weight is going through your feet into the ground. Listen to your steps, its rhythm, its length, its regularities or irregularities.

2. **Explore the Space**
   Now turn your attention to your surroundings. As you walk, let your curiosity guide you. Look around at the objects, the play of light, and the different areas of the room. If you feel drawn to a particular object or spot, walk over to it. If you wish, you can gently touch or smell objects to familiarize yourself with their smell, textures and forms, getting to know your environment through multiple senses.

3. **Turn Attention Inward to the Body**
   Now, shift your focus from the external space to your own body. This is a guided, internal journey of movement, starting from your feet and working your way up to your head. Follow these more detailed steps for this part of the exercise:

   - **Feet and Ankles:** Bring your awareness to your feet. Feel their connection to the floor as you walk. Pause and gently shift your weight from one foot to the other. Explore small movements in your ankles—flexing, pointing, and rotating them gently.

   - **Knees and Hips:** Allow the movement to travel up to your knees. Bend and straighten them softly. Then, bring your attention to your hips, exploring their range of motion with small circles or gentle sways.

   - **Spine and Torso:** Continue the journey of movement up your spine. Allow your torso to twist gently from side to side, or ex-

plore soft forward and backward bends. Notice how your breath supports these movements.

- **Shoulders, Arms, and Hands:** Bring your awareness to your shoulders. Roll them forward and back. Let your arms and hands move freely, perhaps exploring the space around you or the texture of your own skin and clothing.

- **Neck and Head:** Finally, allow your attention to rest on your neck and head. Gently nod "yes" and "no," or make small, slow circles with your head. Be mindful of any tension and move within a comfortable range.

Throughout this entire sequence, the key is to stay connected to the physical sensations in your body. Notice areas of ease or tension without judgment.

Benefits for Stress-Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Enhances Body Awareness:** By systematically bringing attention to different parts of the body, you strengthen the mind-body connection. This practice is grounding and can counteract the feeling of being "in your head," which often accompanies stress.

- **Develops Emotional Intelligence:** This non-verbal exploration of movement can help you to become more aware of your inner emotional state, providing insights into feelings that may be contributing to stress or burnout.

- **Reduces Physical Tension:** The gentle, mindful movements serve as a warm-up, helping to release stored tension in the muscles and calm the nervous system.

- **Promotes Mindfulness:** The focus on the "here and now"—the sensations of your body and the details of your environment—is a powerful mindfulness practice that can interrupt the cycle of anxious or stressful thoughts.

- **Provides a Restorative Break:** Taking the time for this kind of introspective, physical exercise can be a restorative ritual, helping to replenish mental and emotional resources and prevent the depletion that leads to burnout.

Wheel of Awareness Meditation

The primary goal of this exercise is to guide your attention inward, moving through different layers of awareness to arrive at a state of deep connection with your body. It is a practice of focused mindfulness that helps to calm the mind and ground you in the present moment.

Instructions

Find a quiet, comfortable space where you can stand or sit undisturbed for about 10-15 minutes.

1. **Awareness of Sights:** Begin by slowly looking around the room, taking note of the lights, colors, and shapes you see. Then, gently close your eyes and observe what you perceive with your eyes shut. Let these images go.

2. **Awareness of Sounds:** Shift your attention to the sounds in your environment. Notice sounds that are far away and those that are near. Acknowledge each sound without judgment and then let it go.

3. **Awareness of Thoughts:** Turn your focus to the thoughts that arise in your mind. Observe them as if they are clouds passing in the sky, without getting attached to them or pushing them away. Simply let them be.

4. **Awareness of Body Sensations:** Bring your awareness to your physical body. Notice the sensation of your breath and any small, spontaneous movements. Conduct a mental scan of your body, paying attention to each part from your toes to your head.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Promotes Mindfulness:** By systematically focusing your attention, you practice being fully present, which can interrupt the cycle of stressful or anxious thoughts.

- **Reduces Mental Clutter:** The act of noticing and letting go of sights, sounds, and thoughts helps to clear the mind, reducing the feeling of being mentally overwhelmed.

- **Enhances Body Connection:** Tuning into your physical sensations helps to ground you and can reduce the sense of disconnection that often comes with chronic stress.

- **Calms the Nervous System:** This quiet, focused practice can help to activate the body's relaxation response, lowering heart rate and promoting a sense of peace.

Link:

➔ *If you prefer to be lead through this exercise, you can find a good video for that here: https://youtu.be/kZrjmPPvE7k?si=KkhWO1kuc8c-CeYYf*

Small Dance:
A Solo Movement Practice

Goal of the Exercise

The goal of the "Small Dance" is to explore free and spontaneous movement within your personal space, or "kinesphere." It is an exercise in body awareness and self-expression, designed to release tension and foster a sense of joyful freedom. This practice is coming from the dance teacher Steve Paxton.

Instructions

This exercise can be done in the same quiet space, following the "Wheel of Meditation" or on its own. It takes about 10-15 minutes, and you may wish to play some gentle, atmospheric music.

1. **Notice Small Impulses:** Stand in a comfortable position, close your eyes and bring your attention to the subtle, spontaneous movements your body is already making—the sway of your balance, the rhythm of your breath. You might notice your balance going from one leg to the other. You might notice, your shoulders and arms moving with your breath. You might also notice a subtle movement of your hips. Just see with your inner eyes, and feel, what part of you is moving. This small movements are your "Small dance".

2. **Allow Movement to Emerge:** When you feel a subtle impulse to move, allow it to happen. Let these small movements gradually become larger and more expressive. There is no right or wrong way to move; simply follow what feels natural.

3. **Explore Your Kinesphere:** Imagine you are standing inside a large bubble that you can touch in all directions without taking a step. This is your kinesphere. Let your dance explore the boundaries of this personal space.

4. **Return to Stillness:** As the music fades or you feel ready, allow your movements to become smaller and slower until you come to a complete stop. Stand in silence for a moment and notice how you feel.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Releases Physical Tension:** Gentle, free-form movement is an excellent way to release stored tension in the muscles, which is a common physical manifestation of stress.

- **Provides an Outlet for Emotions:** Dance can be a powerful, non-verbal way to express and process emotions that may be contributing to feelings of stress or burnout.

- **Boosts Mood and Energy:** Engaging in this playful and creative form of movement can boost your mood and help to replenish the mental and emotional energy depleted by chronic stress.

- **Enhances Self-Awareness:** By listening to your body's impulses, you build a stronger connection to your physical self and your own needs, which is a key component of preventing burnout.

Spinal Piano

This is an intimate bodywork exercise for two people that uses mindful touch to foster a deep sense of body awareness and relaxation. It is essential to choose a partner you trust and are happy to be touched by, whether it's a significant other, a close family member, or a trusted friend.

Goal of the Exercise

The primary goal of this exercise is to help you "arrive in your body" through the experience of giving and receiving gentle, focused touch. It aims to increase body awareness, build trust between partners, and promote a state of deep relaxation.

Instructions

This exercise should be done in a warm, comfortable room and will take about 15 minutes to complete. You will need a soft surface, like a yoga mat or a blanket, for one person to lie on.

The exercise is performed in two rounds so that each partner has a turn in both roles: the "giver" and the "receiver" of touch.

Round 1:

1. **Choose Roles:** Decide with your partner who will be the first to receive the touch and who will be the first to give it.

2. **Positioning:** The receiver lies comfortably on their stomach on the mat. The giver kneels or sits beside them in a relaxed position.

3. **Initial Contact:** The giver gently places their hands on the receiver's back. It is important to leave them there for several moments, allowing the receiver to get used to the sensation of being touched. The touch should be firm enough to feel present, but not a strong push; it should also not be so light that it tickles.

4. **Finding the Spine:** The giver then begins to use their fingers to gently find the receiver's vertebrae, one by one. It is important to be sensitive and communicative, ensuring the touch remains comfortable, especially around the lower back and tailbone area. The giver should ask if the touch is okay.

5. **Playing the Spinal Piano:** The giver then "plays" on the spine as if it were a piano, letting their fingers move gently up and down the vertebrae. This can be done with one or both hands.

Round 2:

6. **Switch Roles:** After about 6-7 minutes, the partners switch roles. The giver now becomes the receiver, and the process is repeated.

Sharing:

7. After both partners have had a turn, take a moment to share with each other in a sentence or two what the experience was like for you.

Benefits for Stress-Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Deepens Body Awareness and Connection:** The focused, gentle touch brings a heightened awareness to the body, helping to ground the receiver in the present moment. This can counteract the sense of disconnection that often accompanies chronic stress.

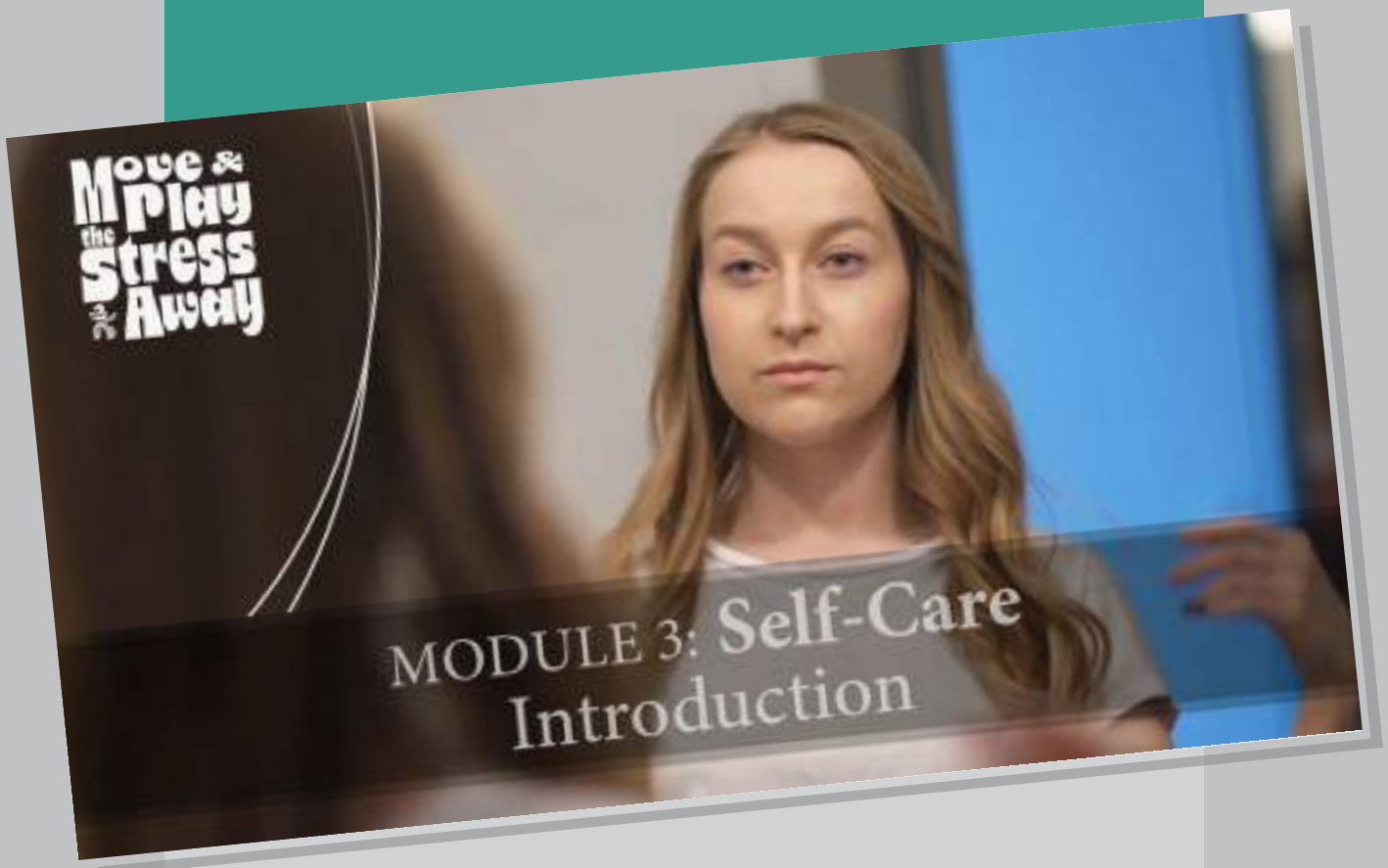
- **Builds Trust and Safety:** This exercise is built on a foundation of trust and consent. The experience of safe, nurturing touch can be deeply restorative and helps to foster a sense of emotional safety and connection, which is a powerful antidote to the isolation that can come with burnout.

- **Reduces Physical Tension:** The gentle pressure along the spine can help to release muscle tension in the back, a common area for holding stress. This can activate the body's relaxation response.

- **Promotes Mindfulness:** For both the giver and the receiver, the exercise requires a high degree of focused attention. This mindfulness on the sensation of touch helps to quiet a busy mind and interrupt stressful thought patterns.

- **Encourages Mutual Support:** The act of giving and receiving care in this way reinforces the social bond between partners, providing a sense of mutual support that is crucial for building resilience against burnout.

Self-Care



This is an introductory video of the module.

Caring about yourself – Positive Affirmations

Our fourth module is caring about yourself, your body, your soul, as a whole. This always start with believing that you are worth to do it. That is why we start this module with positive affirmations.

Positive affirmations have become one of the most widespread and popular techniques of personal development and self-help psychology. There is still relatively little research in this area to say with scientific certainty that it is a proven working method (see below for a link to some research on the positive impact of affirmations). However, people around the world use positive affirmations extensively and testify to their working. They help them feel better, overcome challenging situations and fulfill their dreams. There seems to be something to them.

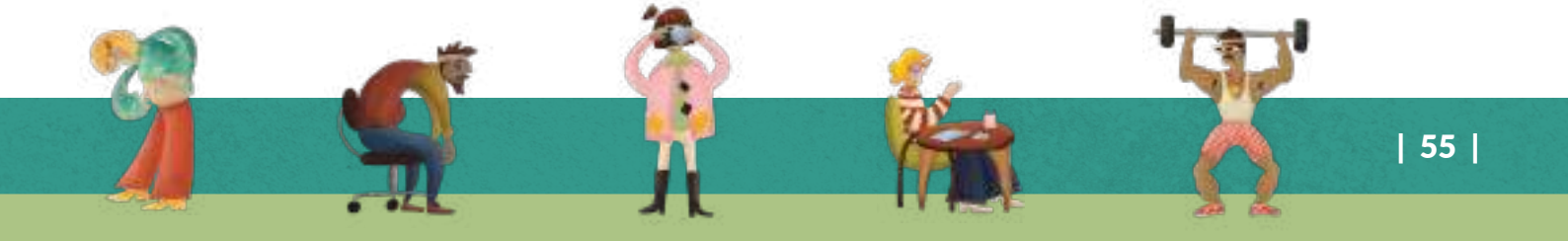
Positive affirmations are nothing new, however. People have known the power of words, whether spoken aloud or in the spirit, since time immemorial. They have been used, for example, by Buddhism in the form of mantras, by Christianity in the form of prayer, and by more recent techniques such as hypnosis, self-hypnosis, the Silva method and many others.

According to the dictionary, affirmation means - a statement or sign that something is true/ an expression of support or approval (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/affirmation).

Whatever we affirm, we declare and accept as true. What we perceive as true, what we truly believe deep down, will manifest in our life experience. Regularly repeating affirmations can boost self-confidence, reduce negative self-talk, and reinforce a positive self-image.

Positive affirmations help to reshape the way you think, perceive and see yourself and your world. These internal processes have a profound effect on how we perceive ourselves, our environment, how we act and what we attract into our lives. By transforming them, we can transform our whole life.

We use affirmations pretty much all the time, even if we are not always aware of it. At the most basic level, they are our inner beliefs. What we internally believe to be true, what we internally agree



with. What is true about ourselves, our lives and the world around us. From these beliefs then come our thoughts, inner dialogues and ultimately our words and actions. These are all affirmations.

We all hold all sorts of beliefs. And they are not always positive. Negative beliefs then cause experiences that are not very pleasant for us. Examples of negative beliefs include - life is hard... you have to work hard for money... it's hard to make friends... women/men/politicians etc. are not to be trusted...

Moreover, our beliefs create a certain general atmosphere within us from which thoughts and inner monologues and dialogues then sprout.

Beliefs we have developed over a lifetime. Either we accepted them from someone else, from the norms of society, or from some experience. Maybe we've failed at something and we've accepted the idea that we're incompetent. And then we automatically put other somewhat similar experiences into the same framework and the connection became stronger and stronger. When a solid enough foundation of the belief that I was incapable was built up, the direction was reversed and the belief began to influence our perception and experience. We began to perceive, evaluate, and act upon it. And we also attracted more and more experiences into our lives that confirmed this belief, and it continued to strengthen. Like a vicious circle.

One way to break the cycle is through positive affirmations.

With their help, it is possible to realign the connections of our thinking and perception, to change our beliefs and what we believe. And our lives will change accordingly.

Positive affirmations are not magic. We can change our beliefs and thoughts simply by making a decision and insisting on that decision. It is important to remember that nothing has a given meaning. We determine it. All we have to do is decide to accept something else as true. You have more power over your life than you have ever thought. And that power is within you.

Simply deciding and trusting something else sounds easy, but in practice, it is not so easy, at least at first. We don't really know how to do it.

That's where positive affirmations can help.

They help us to be clear about what it is that we want. They also help us to calm and redirect the flow of negative thoughts and monologues. They help us to remember what we have chosen and to tune in to it.

In our next video you learn more about how to harness the power of affirmations in your daily life.

Sources

- ➔ *Cohen GL, Sherman DK. The Psychology of Change: Self-Affirmation and Social Psychological Intervention. Annual Review of Psychology.*
- ➔ *Creswell JD, Dutcher JM, et al. Sel f-Affirmation Improves Problem-Solving Under Stress. PLoS One. May 2013.*
- ➔ *Epton T, et al. The Impact of Self-Affirmation on Health-Behavior Change: A Meta-Analysis. Health Psychology. March 2015.*
- ➔ *https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-age-of-overindulgence/202307/the-science-behind-self-affirmations*

This video explains that affirmations are tools to reprogram the mind, emphasizing that our inner thoughts and emotions create our reality. It provides guidance on how to create and practice affirmations effectively, such as making them relevant, stating them in the present tense, and repeating them daily to create lasting change.

Chronic Stress and Eating Patterns

Even if we affirm ourselves, that we are good and valuable enough, and change the mindset, caring for ourselves is more than that. Changing our bad eating habits is also an important step.

How Chronic Stress Affects Eating Patterns

Chronic stress can affect the body's use of calories and nutrients in a number of ways. It increases the body's metabolic needs and increases the use and excretion of many nutrients. If you are not eating a nutritious diet, this can lead to deficiencies. Stress also creates a chain reaction of behaviours that can negatively affect eating habits and lead to other health problems in the future.

When the body is under stress, it needs more oxygen, energy, and nutrients. However, people who suffer from chronic stress often have a desire for foods that are comforting but unhealthy, such as snacks or sweets that are rich in fat and calories but poor in nutrients. People who are stressed may not have the time or interest to cook healthy, balanced meals, or may miss or ignore their meals. Stress can affect sleep quality by making it lighter or more interrupted, which results in tiredness during the day. To deal with daytime tiredness, people may rely on stimulants to boost their energy, such as caffeine or high-calorie foods. The opposite may also be true, that poor sleep is a source of stress. Research has shown that sleep deprivation leads to a significant rise in cortisol levels.

During short-term stress, the hormone adrenaline reduces the appetite. But with long-term stress, high levels of cortisol may trigger cravings, especially for foods that are high in sugar, fat, and calories, which may cause weight gain. Cortisol promotes the storage of fat in the abdominal area, also known as central adiposity, which is linked to insulin resistance and a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some breast cancers. It also decreases levels of the hormone leptin (that makes you feel full) while increasing the hormone ghrelin (that makes you feel hungry).

Emotional eating

Food serves as natural fuel to us, but when stress eating during challenging circumstances happens often, it may negatively impact health and overall well-being. Moreover, stress eating, which involves consuming food not out of physical hunger but to suppress or conceal unpleasant emotions and situa-

tions, is a common response to challenging circumstances.

Not all of the time we eat to satisfy our physical hunger. Many also use food for comfort, stress relief, or self-care. And when we do, we frequently turn to sugary snacks, fast food, and other soothing but harmful foods.

Unfortunately, emotional eating doesn't address emotional issues. It typically makes you feel worse. Afterward, the initial emotional problem persists, and you also feel bad for overeating.

Finding the difference between emotional and physical hunger is essential in combating emotional eating. This may be more difficult than it appears, mainly if you frequently use food to cope with your emotions.

Because emotional hunger may be so intense, it's simple to confuse it with actual desire. However, there are indicators you can look for to distinguish between physical and emotional hunger to avoid mindless eating.

Sources:

- ➔ *Yau YH, Potenza MN. Stress and eating behaviors. Minerva Endocrinol. 2013 Sep;38(3):255-67. PMID: 24126546; PMCID: PMC4214609.*
- ➔ *https://fitelo.co/resources/articles/stress-eating/*

Emotional hunger	Physical hunger
Emotional hunger appears out of nowhere	Physical hunger gradually develops
Not even a full stomach can quench emotional hunger	Once you are full physical hunger ends
Emotional eating results in feeling of shame, guilt and powerlessness	You don't feel horrible about yourself if you eat to satisfy bodily hunger
A feeling of immediate satisfaction is associated with emotional hunger	Physical hunger can wait
Certain comfort foods are craved during emotional eating	There are numerous satisfying solutions available when one is physically hungry

Strengthening the Immune System through Diet and Nutrition

In our last article we already discussed how bad eating habits are adding to our problems with stress, and what are the causes. In this article we look into, how good eating habits can counteract the impacts of chronic stress and burnout.

An optimal immune response depends on an adequate diet and nutrition in order to keep infection at bay. We highlight the importance of an optimal status of relevant nutrients to effectively reduce inflammation and oxidative stress, thereby strengthening the immune system.

- For example, **sufficient protein intake is crucial for optimal antibody production.** Protein intake of high biological value and from healthy dietary choices, such as from eggs, fish, lean meat (e.g., poultry), and whey protein (or other non-fat dairy protein), when eaten together with meals, may lower post-prandial lipogenesis and inflammation.

- Low micronutrient status, such as of **vitamin A or zinc, has been associated with increased infection risk.** Micronutrients encompass 12 vitamins, as well as several macro-minerals and trace elements, all of which are defined as essential. By contrast, the roles of ultra-trace elements, such as nickel or boron, are unclear.

- **Dietary constituents with especially high anti-inflammatory and antioxidant capacity include vitamin C, vitamin E, and phytochemicals such as carotenoids and polyphenols.**

- **Vitamin D** in particular may perturb viral cellular infection via interacting with cell entry receptors. Vitamin D can be taken up from the diet via fish, eggs, fortified milk, and mushrooms, but it can also be synthesized under the skin in the presence of UV-light from cholesterol

- **Dietary fiber,** fermented by the gut microbiota into short-chain fatty acids, has also been shown to **produce anti-inflammatory effects.** In general, while the intake of 25 g and 38 g of fiber for women and men, respectively, is recommended, true intake is generally lower (around 15–20 g/d), at least in Westernized countries. Dietary fiber has been reported to increase the diversity of gut microbiota and promote health-associated bacteria such as Bifidobacterium spp. and Lactobaccillus spp., which have been related to, among others, mucosal inflammation.

This sounds really important – and also very scientific. But what steps shall we exactly make to a stress-reducing diet? We discover it in our next video.

Source:

➔ *Iddir M, Brito A, Dingeo G, Fernandez Del Campo SS, Samouda H, La Frano MR, Bohn T. Strengthening the Immune System and Reducing Inflammation and Oxidative Stress through Diet and Nutrition: Considerations during the COVID-19 Crisis. Nutrients. 2020 May 27;12(6):1562. doi: 10.3390/nu12061562. PMID: 32471251; PMCID: PMC7352291.*

This is a video file introducing the concept and practice of healthy eating, and how it helps to fight stress.

Mindful Eating

So now, as we already know, what to eat, (and what not to eat), in the last section of this module we turn to the question of HOW to eat, as the process is as important, as the content.

Mindful eating, also known as conscious eating, involves fully focusing on your food, your emotions, your hunger signals, and your feelings of fullness. It's not just about eating slowly or choosing nutritious foods; it's about fostering a deeper, more conscious connection with what we consume. By learning to eat more slowly and mindfully, we can not only enhance our enjoyment of meals but also become more in tune with our body's needs, leading to better well-being and satisfaction.

What we'd like to propose is a concept we refer to as more mindful eating, or perhaps „informal" mindful eating as an alternative to formal mindful eating.

Mindful eating aids in making healthier food choices and cultivating habits that enhance both physical and mental well-being. Here are several suggestions for the beginning to eat in a more mindful manner:

Allow your body to catch up with the brain

Eating too quickly and ignoring your body's fullness signals can lead to overeating. On the other hand, slowing down and stopping when your body signals that it's full can help maintain a healthy diet.

Slowing down is an effective way to align our mind and body, helping us understand our true nutritional needs. Our body sends a signal of satiety about 20 minutes after our brain does, which is why we often end up eating more than necessary without realizing it. By slowing down, we give our body an opportunity to synchronize with our brain and respond to its signals.

Simple strategies to slow down can include adopting traditional eating habits, such as sitting down to eat, chewing each bite at least 25 times, and putting down your fork between bites. These seemingly old-fashioned manners can actually be quite beneficial in promoting mindful eating.

Ask yourself: What are some ways you can slow down eating and listen more deeply to your body's signals?

Understanding of your body's personal hunger signals

Are you responding to an emotional want or responding to your body's needs?

We often prioritize our minds, but like many mindfulness practices, we might find more insight by first tuning into our bodies. Instead of eating solely in response to emotional signals, such as stress, sadness, frustration, loneliness, or even boredom, we can pay attention to our bodies. Is your stomach growling? Is your energy low? Are you feeling slightly lightheaded? Often, we eat because our mind tells us to, not because our bodies need nourishment. Genuine mindful eating involves deeply listening to our body's hunger signals.

Ask yourself: What are your body's hunger signals, and what are your emotional hunger triggers?

Cultivate a mindful kitchen for mindful eating

Eating alone or at random times and places can often lead to mindless eating. This involves aimlessly searching through cabinets and eating whenever and wherever, rather than planning our meals and snacks. This not only slows us down but also prevents us from developing healthy cues about what and how much to eat, and conditions our brains to new, not always ideal, cues for eating. For instance, do we really want to create a habit of eating every time we get in the car, or in other similar situations? While we all snack occasionally, it can greatly enhance our physical and mental health, mood, and sleep schedule to eat at consistent times and places. This means sitting down (preferably at a table!), serving food on a plate or in a bowl instead of eating directly from the container, and using utensils instead of our hands. Eating with others is also beneficial as it not only allows us to share and form healthy connections, but also helps us slow down, enjoy our food and conversation more, and take our eating cues from our dining partner, preventing emotional overeating or undereating.

Having a mindful kitchen involves organizing and caring for your kitchen space in a way that promotes healthy eating and nourishing gatherings. Consider what you bring into your kitchen and how you store things. Are healthy foods easily accessible? What types of foods are visible? Remember, when food is within reach, we're more likely to eat it.

You don't have to plan every bite of your food, and it's crucial to maintain flexibility, particularly during special events. However, be mindful that your eating habits may change during different seasons or occasions. When you do plan ahead, you're more likely to consume the amount your body requires at that moment, rather than under-eating and later indulging, or overeating and subsequently regretting it.

The classic advice is not shopping when hungry still holds, but a balanced approach is also important. A psychological phenomenon known as "moral licensing" indicates that shoppers who purchase healthy items like kale are more likely to subsequently visit the alcohol or ice cream aisle than those who don't. It appears we believe our karma will counterbalance and allow us to indulge in junk food or other less ideal behaviors.

Understand your motivations

Eating foods that are emotionally comforting vs. eating foods that are nutritionally healthy.

Finding a balance between nutritious and satisfying foods can be challenging. Recall the first raisin you ate consciously. When we eat slowly and healthfully, like raisins, we often enjoy them more than foods we think are healthy. When we try to eat healthier and more varied, we are less likely to overeat our favourite foods and enjoy healthy foods more, which ultimately brings us mental and physical satisfaction.

Connect more deeply with your food

Considering where food comes from vs. thinking of food as an end product.

If we are not hunters or farmers, we are becoming more and more disconnected from our food. Many of us don't even think about where our food

comes from, apart from the packaging from the supermarket. This is a shame, because food offers us a wonderful opportunity to connect more deeply with nature, the elements and each other. When we stop and think about all the people involved in preparing the food on our plate, from the loved ones who prepared it to those who filled the shelves, planted and harvested the ingredients, it's hard not to feel grateful and connected. We can also reflect on the cultural traditions that brought us this food, recipes generously shared by friends or passed down from a distant place and time in the family. When we consider all that went into the meal, it is easy to show gratitude to all who gave their time and effort, the elements of the universe that contributed their work, our friends or ancestors who shared recipes, and even the beings who may have given their lives as part of the creation of this meal. With a little more of that awareness, we can begin to make wiser choices about the sustainability and health of our food, not just for ourselves, but also for the planet.

Attend to your plate

Distracted eating vs. mindful eating.

Multitasking while eating prevents us from listening deeply to our body's needs and desires. When we are distracted, it is harder to perceive our body's signals about food and other needs. At your next meal, try to just eat, without screens or other distractions, and enjoy the company of the people with whom you share food and conversation. While the formal practice of mindful eating may be something we remember when we look back on a course or retreat we attended, the reality is that we live and eat in the real world, which is a busy place. However, we can use the insights gained from our formal practice - slowing down, listening to our bodies, doing one thing at a time, creating even small rituals and considering everything that has entered our food, and incorporating awareness that is more informal into our daily meals more regularly.

It seems to be a lot to take in – next to taking our food. You don't have to do it all at once. You can choose one-one advise a week, to build it into your eating habits, just a little more consciousness into your cooking habits. It takes time to change our old habits, and maybe we don't even need to change everything. Remember your affirmations: you are OK, and whatever small steps you make to change, that's already something to celebrate.

Source:

➔ *https://www.mindful.org/6-ways-practice-mindful-eating/*

Positive Affirmation Exercise

Here's a simple exercise on the topic of positive affirmations that you can practice daily:

Find a Quiet Space: Begin by finding a quiet and comfortable space where you can sit or stand without interruptions.

Breathe Deeply: Take a few deep breaths to centre yourself. Inhale slowly through your nose, hold for a moment, and exhale through your mouth.

Reflect: Reflect on the aspects of your life you are grateful for or proud of. It could be your health, family, achievements, or even small daily victories.

Choose Your Affirmations: Select a few positive affirmations that resonate with you. Here are some examples:

"I am capable and strong."

"I am worthy of happiness and success."

"I believe in my ability to overcome challenges."

Speak Your Affirmations: Stand in front of a mirror, look into your eyes, and say your chosen affirmations out loud with conviction. Repeat them several times, ideally 3-5 times each.

Feel the Affirmation: As you speak each affirmation, try to feel the truth of the words in your body. Notice any sensations or emotions that arise.

Daily Practice: Make this exercise a part of your daily routine. The best times are usually in the morning after waking up or at night before going to bed.

Remember, the key to this exercise is repetition and emotional engagement. The more you practice, the more you'll start to internalize these positive beliefs. Enjoy your practice!

Gratitude list

We have already seen how affirmations (positive statements that we repeat to ourselves) help to redirect our thought patterns and beliefs. Another tool to encourage a positive perception of what is happening to us and to feel better is to reflect on the things we can be grateful for.

How many times have you looked around you and thought, "Man, I am truly blessed. I have so much to be grateful for." If you're a busy working person like me, then it's probably not nearly enough. Yes, I have a ton of things to be thankful for, but it seems like I'm always so busy that I barely have time to pause for a lunch break, let alone time to count my blessings.

Here we offer an exercise to encourage mindfulness, to intentionally focus on the positive aspects of our lives, and to find joy in the little things.

Create a Gratitude jar as a beautiful exercise to boost your mindfulness and positivity.

How to Make a Gratitude Jar

Equipment:

- An empty jar (or a box if you don't have a jar).
- Paper or small notes.
- A pen.
- Scissors.
- Optional: Ribbon for decoration.
- Optional: Paper glue or sticker paper for creating a label.

Instructions:

- Get your chosen container (jar or box).
- Cut paper into small strips or use our free download with gratitude prompts.
- If you use blank paper, write whatever you're grateful for. If you use the template, it provides prompts to help you think of things to appreciate.
- Tie a ribbon around the rim (optional).
- Create a label for the jar using our free custom labels (optional).

Using Your Gratitude Jar:

- Each day or week, take one of the notes and write down what you're grateful for.
- Fold the note and insert it into your jar.
- Consider creating a family gratitude jar or your team of colleagues and place it where everyone can see it daily.
- Encourage members to add their own notes. Even younger children can draw pictures if they can't write yet.
- When you're feeling down, pick a note from the jar and read it. Let it remind you of the positive aspects of life.

TIP:

You can combine affirmation and gratitude note by incorporating gratitude affirmations. For instance: "I am grateful for the love in my life" or "I appreciate the opportunities that come my way."

Mindful eating

Mindful eating is about how you eat rather than what you eat. Try these simple mindful eating steps:

Adjust Your Environment: Organize your space to promote healthier choices, like having fruits and nuts readily available.

Sit Down to Eat: Make a conscious effort to sit at a table without distractions like PC or smartphones.

Go Dark: Close your eyes as you take a bite to remove visual cues and focus on the taste and fullness.

Engage Your Senses: Observe the appearance, smell, and texture of your food. Chew slowly and savour each bite.

Non-Dominant Hand: Eat with your non-dominant hand to slow down and be more attentive to the eating process.

These exercises aim to help you become more aware of your eating habits and bodily cues, potentially leading to healthier eating patterns. Remember, the goal is to enjoy your food and recognize when you're truly satisfied.

Resource:

➔ *https://health.clevelandclinic.org/mindlessly-snacking-again-try-these-3-simple-mindful-eating-exercises*

How to incorporate mindful eating habits into our daily lives

Incorporating mindful eating habits into our daily routines isn't just about eating slower or choosing healthier foods; it's about cultivating a more intimate and conscious relationship with what we eat. By learning to eat slower and more mindfully, we can not only enjoy our meals more, but also become more attuned to our bodies' needs, leading to greater well-being and satisfaction.

Here are a few simple guidelines to keep in mind to discern between mindless and (more) mindful eating:

6 WAYS TO PRACTICE MINDFUL EATING

MINDLESS EATING	MINDFUL EATING
Eating too quickly and ignoring your body's signals	Listening to your body and stopping when you full
Eating when emotions tell us to eat (i.e., sad, bored, lonely)	Eating when your bodies tell us to eat (i.e., stomach growling, energy low)
Eating alone, at random times and places	Eating with others, at set times and places
Eating foods that are emotionally comforting	Eating foods that are nutritionally healthy
Eating and multitasking	When eating, just eating
Considering a meal and an end product	Considering where food comes from

Source:

➔ *https://www.mindful.org/6-ways-practice-mindful-eating/*

Playful Connections

This is an introductory video to the module.

This video explores the concept of relationships as the fundamental structure for well-being. It sets the stage for understanding how connections are vital before delving into the topic of play.

The Universal Power of Play: Why We Never Outgrow Our Inner Child

In the first video of this module, we explored relationships as the invisible architecture of well-being. In this article, you'll see that play is a universal language of humans and animals—voluntary, joyful, and safe, yet essential for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

Introduction

Have you ever noticed how a playful romp with your pet or a game of tag with friends can instantly lift your spirits and bring a smile to your face? That's because play is more than just a fun pastime; it's a fundamental part of our being, essential for our cognitive, social, and emotional development.

A Universal Language

Play is a universal language, spoken by humans and animals alike. From the playful antics of puppies to the elaborate rituals of birds, play is a common thread that connects us all. It's a way of exploring our world, learning new skills, and connecting with others.

Defining Play

Play is often defined by its key characteristics:

- **Voluntary:** We choose to participate in play for our own enjoyment, not because we're forced to.
- **Enjoyable:** Play feels good! It's something we find intrinsically rewarding.
- **Separate from reality:** Play exists in its own little world, with its own rules and boundaries. This allows us to experiment and explore without the pressures of everyday life.

The Benefits of Play

The benefits of play extend far beyond mere amusement. They permeate every aspect of our lives, from childhood to adulthood:

- **Cognitive Development:** Play fuels our brainpower, enhancing memory, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Studies have

shown that children who engage in more play tend to perform better in school.

- **Social Development:** Play is the foundation for building healthy social interactions. It teaches us how to cooperate, resolve conflicts, and understand different perspectives.

- **Emotional Development:** Play helps us manage our emotions, develop empathy, and boost our self-esteem. It's a therapeutic outlet for stress and anxiety.

- **Physical Development:** Play promotes physical activity, which is crucial for overall health and well-being. It helps us develop coordination, balance, and motor skills.

Lifelong Learning

Humans are unique in their ability to play throughout our lives. And this isn't just for fun; lifelong play can help us maintain brain health, adaptability, and a sense of optimism. Research has shown that activities like playing music and video games can have positive effects on cognitive function.

Play Across Species

Play isn't just a human thing. It's observed in a wide variety of animals, from playful puppies to mischievous monkeys.

Scientists believe that play serves several important functions in animals, including:

- **Practicing skills:** Play can help animals practice important skills for survival, such as hunting, catching prey, and evading predators.

- **Exploring their environment:** Playful exploration helps animals learn about their surroundings and discover new sources of food and shelter.

- **Learning social rules:** Play can help animals learn how to interact with others in their group, including how to cooperate, take turns, and resolve conflicts.

The Science of Play

Scientists have been studying play for many years, and they're still learning more about its benefits and how it works.

One particularly interesting study involved teaching rats to play hide-and-seek. The researchers found that the rats were not only able to learn the game, but they also seemed to enjoy it for its own sake.

This suggests that play is not just a learned behavior; it's something that is deeply rooted in our biology.

Conclusion

Play is a vital part of life for both humans and animals. It shapes our development, enhances our well-being, and connects us to the world around us. So next time you're feeling stressed or bored, take a break and engage in some playful activity. You might be surprised at how much better you feel.

Remember:

- Play is for everyone, regardless of age.

- There are endless ways to play, so find what you enjoy.

- Make time for play in your life, and you'll reap the benefits for years to come.

I hope this article has inspired you to embrace the power of play and incorporate more of it into your daily routine. Let your inner child out and rediscover the joy of playful exploration!

You've now seen the universality and functions of play. In the next video, you'll discover how relationships act as a biological stress buffer—from oxytocin to calming the amygdala.

Sources:

- *Brown, S., & Vaughan, C. (2009). Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul. Avery.*
- *Panksepp, J. (2007). Can play diminish ADHD and facilitate the construction of the social brain? Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 16(2), 57–66.*
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- *Bateson, P., & Martin, P. (2013). Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation. Cambridge University Press.*
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This video discovers how relationships act as a biological stress buffer, detailing mechanisms from the hormone oxytocin to calming the brain's amygdala. It follows the article on the universal power of play.

Play: A Fundamental Human Need

In our previous video, you learned about the biological mechanism of stress regulation through relationships. This article takes it further: it shows that play is deeply embedded in our biology - even in adulthood.

In today's fast-paced, productivity-driven world, the importance of play is often underestimated or neglected. However, scientific research highlights that play is not merely a recreational activity, especially for children, but a fundamental human need essential for physical, mental, and social well-being throughout life. Beyond its well-known benefits on creativity and stress relief, play has deep biological roots that shape the development of the self, agency, and adaptive capacities essential for surviving and thriving in a complex world.

The Biological Roots of Play

Neuroscience and evolutionary biology reveal that play is deeply ingrained in many animal species, including humans. Observations of mammals, from primates to rodents, frequently demonstrate play behaviors, indicating that play serves evolutionary functions beyond mere survival instincts. Although some species survive without engaging in play, most mammals exhibit play, suggesting it is a core biological mechanism tied closely to development and brain function.

Research by Pellis and Pellis (2009) shows that play activates the brain's reward systems—specifically subcortical areas responsible for emotions and motivation. This means play is intrinsically rewarding and evokes joy independent of immediate survival benefits. Contrary to cortical brain functions related to conscious thought and decision-making, play arises deep within the brain's ancient mammalian structures, reinforcing that it is a biological imperative rather than a luxury or purely learned behavior.

Play and the Development of the Self

From the earliest stages of life, play experiences shape a child's understanding of self and agency. Neuroscientific and psychological research detailed by Eva Virag Suhajda emphasizes how even simple, embodied play in infants—such as exploring their own hands or sucking their thumbs—is crucial for integrating sensory, motor, and proprioceptive information to build the "embodied self." This foundational stage, called the "emergent self"

by psychologist Daniel Stern, establishes a core sense of self as separate from the environment and others.

Play strengthens internal models of the world and self, enabling children to discern the consequences of their actions and develop intentionality and voluntary control. The feeling of agency—recognizing oneself as a causal actor—is fostered during freely chosen and intrinsically motivated play. This embodied agency is critical not only for physical development but also for cognitive and emotional growth, leading to more complex forms of social and symbolic play, and ultimately supporting lifelong adaptive behavior.

Evolutionary and Adaptive Significance

The adaptive value of play lies in its role as a safe space for experimentation, learning, and preparation for future challenges. Through play, individuals test behaviors, develop problem-solving abilities, and learn social cooperation and empathy. Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp categorizes play as one of the primary emotional systems, alongside SEEKING, RAGE, FEAR, and CARE, highlighting its foundational role in emotional regulation and social bonding.

Play's adaptive function extends beyond immediate learning to the formation of internal mental models that are crucial for long-term strategic thinking and delayed gratification. These capabilities underpin success in human life, enabling flexibility, creativity, resilience, and goal-directed behavior. Play's unique contribution is allowing individuals to build these skills in a motivationally rich and emotionally rewarding context.

The Crisis of Play Deficit

Despite clear evidence of its importance, society faces a „play deficit" characterized by diminished opportunities for unstructured and self-directed play, especially among children. Factors such as increased academic pressures, overscheduled lives, and safety concerns restrict children's freedom to explore and initiate play. This deficit threatens the development of agency, creativity, and emotional health, with consequences extending into adulthood including higher stress levels, poor coping mechanisms, and social alienation.

Adults too suffer from play deprivation, which limits creativity, problem-solving, and overall life satisfaction. Recent movements to reclaim play through adult summer camps, creative arts, and playful urban design reflect a growing recognition of play's essential role in human flourishing.

Conclusion: Recognizing Play as a Biological and Psychological Necessity

Play is not a mere pastime but a biological, psychological, and social necessity integral to human development and well-being. Rooted deeply in brain evolution, it provides joy and intrinsic motivation while fostering self-awareness, agency, and resilience. Encouraging play at all ages is essential to nurture creativity, improve mental health, and build adaptive capacities for life's challenges. Society must therefore reclaim and prioritize playtime to support healthier, happier, and more engaged individuals.

If play and relationships are so important, then disconnection has a real cost. In the next video, you'll see what we lose through isolation—and how small steps can begin the journey back to others.

Additional Resources and references:

- *Winnicott, D. W. (1971). Playing and Reality. Tavistock Publications.*
- *Suhajda E. V. (2018). The Internal, Neural Dynamics of Play, Learning and the Agency of the Child. In: The Strength of European Diversity for Building Children's Resilience through Play and Drama: A collection of articles from the EU Erasmus Plus ARTPAD project. Ed. W. Russel. University of Gloucestershire. https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/7871/1/ARTPAD-A-Collection-of-Articles-Final-28-08-18.pdf*
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- *The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3934113/*
- *Do You Play Enough? Science Says It's Critical to Your Health and Well-Being: https://www.newsweek.com/2023/07/28/do-you-play-enough-science-says-its-critical-your-health-well-being-1813808.*

This video illustrates what is lost through isolation and social disconnection. It also shows how small steps can help begin the journey back to connecting with others.

Rethinking Work: Why Play is the Missing Piece

In the previous video, you saw the cost of loneliness. This article shows how a playful mindset—curiosity, humor, and experimentation—can transform work: strengthening well-being, creativity, and team relationships.

The traditional view of work and play positions them as opposing forces. Work is seen as serious, focused on outcomes, and often devoid of enjoyment. Play, on the other hand, is associated with leisure, relaxation, and pure fun. However, this binary view overlooks the true potential of both concepts and hinders our experience of work.

The rise of the post-industrial revolution entrenched this „myth of separate spheres," separating work and play in the pursuit of efficiency and profit. Yet, research by academics like Samuel West and Ronit Kark suggests that play can significantly transform work for both individuals and organizations.

While many leaders acknowledge the benefits of a fun work environment, few translate this belief into action. However, a cultural shift is underway. Progressive companies are embracing play, not as a distraction, but as a core value and driver of innovation. Southwest Airlines, IDEO, and Google are prime examples, fostering playful cultures that prioritize discovery and invention.

Why Play Matters in the Workplace

Integrating play into work offers a range of benefits:

- **Enhanced Wellbeing and Resilience:** Play provides a cathartic outlet for expressing frustrations and releasing tension, reducing stress and promoting psychological well-being. Studies by Dr. Claire Petelczyc and Dr. Stuart Brown show that playful work environments lead to lower absenteeism, healthcare costs, and a more positive overall work environment.

- **Unlocking Human Potential:** Play transcends the focus on outcomes inherent in traditional work, allowing for exploration

and experimentation. Professor Kark suggests that by reframing work activities as play, we can embrace intuition, emotion, and risk-taking, fostering creativity. For instance, product design firms encourage „moonshine projects" – playful endeavors with no predefined goals – that have yielded new knowledge and boosted employee morale.

- **Individual Mastery:** Play provides opportunities for experimentation and learning through trial and error. Dr. Brown emphasizes that enjoyment and play are essential for long-term success. Playful exploration allows individuals to master their craft and find deeper satisfaction in their work.

- **Unleashing Organizational Purpose:** Play can transform the nature of work itself. Professor Mainemelis argues that play can be a catalyst for new work opportunities. It's like „play fighting" – the act itself is different from a real fight. Similarly, playful work engages employees in tasks with imagination and flexibility, leading to exciting discoveries and a sense of purpose.

- **Building Connection and Culture:** Play fosters collaboration and connection beyond traditional work roles. Professor Mainemelis found that teams who play together display greater creativity, discover new ways of working, and develop stronger bonds.

Creating a Playful Work Environment

Incorporating play into your work environment starts with identifying the tasks you enjoy the most – the ones that tap into your natural play preferences. Consider doing the same with your team to discover what truly engages them. This self-awareness allows you to design work experiences that incorporate these preferences, leading to a more playful and fulfilling workplace.

Conclusion

The notion of „work-life balance" often implies separate spheres. However, the reality is that play is not a luxury but an essential ingredient for a fulfilling work experience. By embracing play and its associated benefits, we can create organizations that foster creativity, innovation, and well-being for both employees and the organization as a whole. Let's move beyond the outdated work-play dichotomy and embrace the power of „playfilled work" to unlock the full potential of ourselves and our organizations.

These ideas come to life best in practice. In the next video, you'll explore the playful mindset in professional relationships—why playful doesn't mean childish, but more open and resilient.

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- *Petelczyc, C. A., Capezio, A., Wang, L., Restubog, S. L. D., & Aquino, K. (2018). Play at work: An integrative review and agenda for future research. Journal of Management, 44(1), 161–190.*
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- *Mainemelis, C., & Ronson, S. (2006). Ideas are born in fields of play: Towards a theory of play and creativity in organizational settings. Research in Organizational Behavior, 27, 81–131.*

This video explores the practical application of a playful mindset in a professional context, showing why being playful is not childish but rather a sign of being more open and resilient. It brings the ideas from the “Rethinking Work” article to life.

How to Play as an Adult: Rediscovering Joy, Creativity, and Well-being

In the previous video, you saw that being playful at work is not about being less serious, but about being more flexible and open. This article is a practical guide: you'll find Stuart Brown's play personalities, different play styles, and steps to experiment so you can reclaim joy and flow.

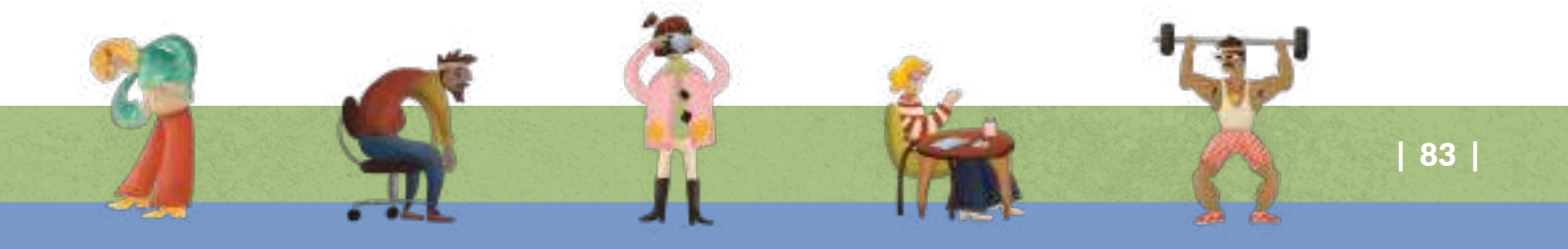
Play is often seen as the province of childhood—a carefree realm of games, imagination, and laughter. Yet, the truth is that play remains a vital and fundamental part of life well into adulthood. Far from being a childish indulgence or distraction, play is a powerful, biologically rooted contributor to adult well-being, creativity, mental health, and social connection. Rediscovering play as adults is about more than just fun; it is about reclaiming a core human capacity that supports resilience and thriving in the complexities of modern life.

The Science Behind Adult Play

Modern neuroscience and psychology reveal that the brain's playful drive does not vanish after childhood but continues to shape how adults think, cope, and interact. Unlike strictly goal-oriented tasks, play activates intrinsic motivation and reward pathways in the brain, particularly in subcortical regions associated with emotion and motivation, similar to what Jaak Panksepp's research on mammalian play suggests. These brain systems underpin creativity, stress reduction, emotional regulation, and social bonding throughout life.

Research shows that adults who engage in playful activities maintain greater brain plasticity, retaining cognitive flexibility that can counteract cognitive decline. The joy and flow states induced by play decrease stress hormones like cortisol and improve mood, acting as natural antidepressants. Moreover, play fosters social connection by creating shared positive experiences, which are crucial for emotional support and healthy relationships.

Contrary to cultural narratives that dismiss play as immature, scientific evidence positions play as a form of adaptive behavior important for life-long learning and psychological health. It supports agen-



cy and the capacity for experimentation—skills essential for adapting to change and solving problems.

Play as an Adult Attitude

Importantly, adult play is less about a specific activity and more about the attitude or mindset we bring. Throwing a ball can be simply exercise, competition, or playful bonding depending on how one engages with it. Even tasks that seem serious, like writing or problem-solving, can become playful when approached with curiosity, openness, and intrinsic enjoyment.

Dr. Stuart Brown, founder of the National Institute for Play, identifies eight „play personalities," highlighting the diversity in how adults find joy through play:

- **Collector**: Finds play in building and accumulating things.
- **Director:** Enjoys organizing and leading playful activities.
- **Competitor:** Thrives on challenge and contests.
- **Creator:** Delights in making and inventing.
- **Kinesthete:** Engages in movement and active play.
- **Thinker:** Prefers intellectual play and puzzles.
- **Storyteller:** Enjoys narrative, role-play, and drama.
- **Dreamer:** Finds pleasure in fantasy and imagination.

Recognizing your play personality can unlock playful activities that naturally resonate, making the process feel authentic rather than forced.

Steps to Embrace Play as an Adult

Step 1: Identify and Reflect on Your Childhood Play

Recall activities from childhood that brought joy and a sense of freedom. These memories can inform the types of play that suit your personality and rekindle innate playful appetites.

Step 2: Explore Your Preferred Play Styles

Reflect on whether you gravitate towards physical, social, intellectual, creative, or imaginative play. Adults often benefit from diversifying how they play to engage different skills and emotions.

Step 3: Experiment Courageously

Try different activities without expectation or judgment. Play thrives in experimentation. If something feels joyless or like a chore, try another. The goal is to kindle intrinsic enjoyment and flow.

Recommendations for Adult Play Areas

To reintegrate play meaningfully, adults can experiment with the following areas:

- **Physical Play:** Team sports, dance, hiking, martial arts, yoga, or simple movement games that engage the body and release energy.
- **Creative Play:** Arts and crafts, music-making, writing, improvisation, or drama classes that tap into imagination and self-expression.
- **Social Play:** Board game nights, improvisational theater, group storytelling, or playful meetups that foster bonding and communication.
- **Intellectual Play:** Puzzles, strategy games, brain-training exercises, or learning new skills that challenge the mind in enjoyable ways.
- **Fantasy and Role Play:** Immersive games like role-playing games (RPGs), live-action role playing (LARP), or even playful daydreaming and imaginative scenarios.
- **Nature Play:** Gardening, outdoor exploration, or playful physical activities in natural

settings, which also provide grounding and stress relief.

- **Digital Play:** Video games, virtual worlds, or online creative collaborations that offer interactive and imaginative escape.

- **Mindful Play:** Activities like playful meditation, playful journaling, or playful mindfulness practices that blend joy with presence and relaxation.

Practical Tips to Sustain Play in Adulthood

- **Schedule Play Time:** Intentionally carve out time for play to counter busy schedules and societal pressures that prioritize work over leisure.

- **Create Play-Friendly Environments:** Surround yourself with people, spaces, and objects that invite playful interaction.

- **Allow for Imperfection:** Play involves taking risks and sometimes "failing." Embrace imperfections as part of the playful process.

- **Balance Structured and Unstructured Play:** Both have value—structured play offers learning goals and community, while unstructured play offers freedom and creativity.

- **Reclaim Inner Child:** Permit yourself to be silly, curious, and spontaneous without self-criticism.

- **Engage with Playful Communities:** Join clubs, workshops, or gatherings that encourage adult play.

Avoiding Common Barriers

Adults frequently cite lack of time, fear of judgment, or feeling that play is frivolous as barriers. However, research reveals that prioritizing play enhances productivity, emotional resilience, and cognitive health. Reframing play as essential self-care rather than trivial indulgence helps overcome these obstacles.

Conclusion

Play is not confined to childhood but is a lifelong biological and psychological necessity. It nurtures creativity, well-being, social bonds, and adaptive capacity. By intentionally embracing play through varied activities tailored to one's unique play personality and style, adults can rediscover joy and flow in everyday life. Integrating play leads to greater balance, health, and resilience in the face of modern challenges.

Congratulations—you've just completed the Playful Connections module. To finish, choose one mini-practice for this week: maybe a 10-minute creative challenge, a phone call to your 'buffer person,' or 20 minutes of play in your own style. Remember: small steps build the great architecture of well-being.

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Quick Games and Activities for Work: Boost Creativity and Energy in Minutes

While concentrating on our daily tasks, it's easy to forget to take breaks and relax. However, short breaks from work are essential for maintaining concentration, creativity, and well-being. Fortunately, there are many quick games and activities that can be organized in the workplace, requiring minimal time and space. Here are a few inspirations:

Creative Drawing:

- **Rules:** Participants draw something based on a given topic or word in a set amount of time. You can draw individually or in pairs/teams.
- **Benefits:** Stimulates creativity, abstract thinking, and artistic skills.
- **Preparation:** You need paper and drawing supplies.

Brain Teasers:

- **Math:**
  - How many letters are in the word "five"? (Answer: 4)
  - If you add one more wheel to a two-wheeled bicycle, how many wheels does it have? (Answer: Three, because one wheel is part of the bike and two are added)
  - A mother is 26 years old and her daughter is 6 years old. How many years will the mother be older than the daughter in 10 years? (Answer: 20, because the age difference will always be 20 years)
- **Logic:**
  - What is as light as a feather, but the strongest man in the world cannot lift it? (Answer: Breath)
  - What has a neck but no head, a body but no legs? (Answer: A shirt)
  - How many times can you subtract 5 from 25? (Answer: Four, because 25 - 5 = 20, 20 - 5 = 15, 15 - 5 = 10, 10 - 5 = 5)

Word Games:

- **City-Country-River:**
  - Players write down a table on a piece of paper with columns for the categories: City, Country, River, Mountain, Animal.
  - The first person says a category and comes up with a word on that letter, e.g. "City: Krakow".

- The other players have one minute to come up with a word on the same letter in the remaining categories, e.g. “Country: Canada”, “River: Vistula”, “Mountain: K2”, “Animal: Horse”.

- The first person to write down all the words in their table wins the round.

- **Verbal Pictionary:**
  - One player chooses a word and says it aloud, but they cannot show it with a gesture.

  - The other players take turns giving clues, and the leader says “yes” or “no” depending on whether the

Additional tips:

- Get others involved in the game! The more people who participate, the more fun and benefits there will be.

- Adapt the games to the time and space available. Choose short and simple games that don’t require a lot of space.

- Have fun! The most important thing is to relax and enjoy the game.

Remember, even a short break and some fun at work can do wonders for your creativity, productivity, and overall well-being. Try these games and see for yourself!

6 Engaging Party Games for Adults (No Alcohol Required)

Liven up your next gathering with these fun and interactive party games that don't require a single drop of alcohol. Whether you're hosting a game night with friends, a family reunion, or a casual get-together, these games are sure to bring laughter, excitement, and create lasting memories.

1. Two Truths and a Lie

Objective: To test your friends' ability to spot deception and reveal your hidden depths.

Materials: None

Instructions:

1. Each player takes a turn stating three things about themselves: two true statements and one lie.
2. Other players try to guess which statement is the lie.
3. The player who correctly identifies the lie scores a point.

2. Charades

Objective: To convey words, phrases, or titles through nonverbal gestures and acting without speaking.

Materials: Paper and pens/pencils

Instructions:

1. Divide the players into two teams.
2. One player from Team A volunteers to act out a word, phrase, or title written on a piece of paper by a teammate.
3. Their teammates try to guess the word within a set time limit.
4. If the team guesses correctly, they get a point. Then, a player from Team B takes their turn.

3. Never Have I Ever

Objective: To reveal common and uncommon experiences while having a lighthearted and humorous exchange.

Materials: None

Instructions:

1. Players take turns saying "Never have I ever..." followed by an experience they have never done.
2. If any other player has done that experience, they must put down a finger.
3. The first player to put down all their fingers loses the game.

4. Pictionary

Objective: To test your drawing skills and your teammates' ability to decipher your artistic creations.

Materials: Paper, pens/pencils, and a whiteboard or large piece of paper (optional)

Instructions:

1. Divide the players into two teams.
2. One player from Team A volunteers to draw a word, phrase, or title written on a piece of paper by a teammate.

3. Their teammates try to guess the word within a set time limit.
4. If the team guesses correctly, they get a point. Then, a player from Team B takes their turn.

5. Scattergories

Objective: To flex your vocabulary and creativity while thinking under pressure.

Materials: Paper, pens/pencils, and a category list (prepared beforehand or found online)

Instructions:

1. Each player takes a piece of paper and writes down the categories at the top.
2. Set a timer for a short period (e.g., 2 minutes).
3. When the timer starts, each player writes down a word starting with the same letter for each category.
4. For example, if the categories are "Animals," "Countries," and "Food," and the letter is "A," a player might write "Ant," "Australia," and "Apple."
5. After the timer stops, players score points for unique answers. If two players have the same answer in a category, no one scores for that category.

6. Back-to-Back Drawing

Objective: To test your communication and artistic skills while working together as a pair.

Materials: Paper, pens/pencils, and a blindfold or scarf

Instructions:

1. Divide the players into pairs.
2. One player in each pair is blindfolded or has their eyes covered.
3. The other player provides verbal instructions to help their blindfolded partner draw a picture on a piece of paper.
4. The blindfolded player tries their best to interpret the instructions and create the drawing.
5. After a set time, the blindfolds are removed, and the pairs reveal their drawings. The most recognizable or humorous drawing wins.

Recognize Playful Moments

Definition:

Playful moments are those brief instances of joy, spontaneity, and lightheartedness that occur in our everyday lives. They can be simple moments of laughter, creativity, or connection with others.

Examples:

- A child giggling while playing with a toy.
- Two friends sharing a funny inside joke.
- A group of people dancing spontaneously to music.
- A dog chasing its tail with unbridled enthusiasm.
- A person enjoying a moment of solitude in nature.

Instructions:

1. **Pay attention to your surroundings.** Throughout the day, make a conscious effort to notice the playful moments happening around you.
2. **Observe the details.** What are the sights, sounds, and sensations that characterize these moments? What emotions do they evoke in you?
3. **Reflect on your own playful moments.** When do you feel most playful? What activities or situations bring you joy and a sense of lightheartedness?
4. **Embrace the playful spirit.** As you recognize playful moments, allow yourself to engage in them fully. Let go of inhibitions and embrace the joy of the moment.

Benefits:

- **Reduced stress and anxiety:** Playful moments can help to lower stress levels and promote relaxation.
- **Increased creativity and problem-solving abilities:** Play can stimulate creativity and new ways of thinking.
- **Enhanced social connections:** Playful interactions can strengthen bonds with others and foster a sense of belonging.
- **Greater overall well-being:** Incorporating playful moments into your life can contribute to a more positive and fulfilling existence.

Connecting to Nature

This is an introductory video of the module.

Urbanization and the need to reconnect with Nature

In this module, we would like to explore, how nature helps against stress and burnout. For this it is first important to understand how the lack of nature is leading to these phenomena.

In 2024, approximately 58% of the world's population lives in cities, and UN projections estimate this number will reach 68% by 2050. In Hungary, around 73% of the population is urban; in Poland, it is about 60%; and in the Czech Republic, it's approximately 74%—all showing stable or modest urban growth.

Urbanization affects the natural environment, society, and, "naturally," the individual. Personal challenges can manifest in several areas, including:

- **A lack of mindfulness and a sense of alienation from oneself:** It's common to feel small or lost, or as if you're watching your own life from the outside. You may feel a lack of meaning in life, and in severe cases, this can lead to depression. In such situations, don't hesitate to seek professional help.
- **A decrease in the sense of community,** partly due to the breakdown of traditional family and community models. In urban environments, we often live among strangers, sometimes not even knowing our own neighbors. Family and friends may be far away, sometimes in other cities or even countries. This can lead to loneliness and a turn to the virtual world and even virtual friends, which, paradoxically, can further intensify the feeling of alienation and loneliness.
- **Alienation from nature.** Our distance from the natural environment makes us feel less like a part of it.

All this contrasts with the extraordinary human need for a meaningful, deep-level connection with themselves, their communities, and their natural environment. Relying on the healing power of nature is the most ancient form of psychotherapy, and many still turn to nature to cope with difficulties.

Living in and being vulnerable to nature has accompanied humanity for almost its entire history. It's only in the last few decades, or perhaps a century, that a portion of humanity has stepped out of this natural existence, which has left a sharp void. Richard Louv calls this the "nature-deficit disorder". Nature-deficit disorder is not a medical term; it's a condition that highlights the costs of alienation from nature, especially for children who now often spend more time in the virtual world than in the natural one. In response, Louv suggests taking in "Vitamin N" (Vitamin Nature), which is a new-old hybrid approach to the nature-virtuality-human relationship. Sounds exciting? We'll explain it in detail in a later article.

A connection with nature "naturally" develops in a world where children spend a lot of time outdoors, but what can we do in our world? David Abram (1996) emphasizes that direct, sensed reality, in its more-than-human mystery, remains our only anchor today as electronically generated vistas and dreams shape our experiential world. Only regular contact with the tangible earth and sky can help us orient ourselves and navigate the many dimensions of our lives. However, we can also shape our own sensed reality, and in a future article, we will provide ideas on how to compensate for the harshness of urban life in the classroom or at home.

In another work (Becoming an Animal, 2010), Abram argues that to restore our relationship with nature, we must find "a new way of speaking that embodies our 'being with' the earth... A style of speech that opens our senses to the sensuousness". Our language shapes our thoughts and attitudes, and the reverse is also true—our thoughts shape our language. The field of ecolinguistics deals with ecological language use, which we will also cover later.

Richard Louv, on the other hand, recommends taking in Vitamin Nature and creating a nature-digital world hybrid.

All of these topics will be covered in our upcoming articles and videos. So, many exciting topics await us! For now, let's step away from reading, drink a glass of water, and seek a connection with the nature around us! Our next video will help to change the way we look at it.

Sources:

- *Abram, D. (1996). The Spell of the Sensuous. Vintage Books.*
- *Abram, D. (2011). Becoming Animal. An Earthly Cosmology. Vintage Books.*
- *Louv, R. (2008). Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder. Algonquin Books.*
- *Louv R. (2012). The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age. Algonquin Books.*
- *Suhajda Éva. V., Vastag Zs. (2017). Kapcsolódás a természettel és önmagunkkal (Connecting to Nature and Self). In: Közösségi tudások - Tudásközösségek-Tudásmenedzsment elméleti és módszertani megközelítésben a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Gazdaságtudományi Bizottság Tudásmenedzsment Munkabizottságának III. számú gyűjteményes kötete 2012-2016. Ed. Noszkay E. MTA GB Tudásmenedzsment Munkabizottság. Letölthető: http://www.titoktan.hu/_raktar/_e_vilagi_gondolatok/NoszkayE-Kozossegi-tudasok-Tudaskozossegek.pdf.*
- *World Population Review: https://worldpopulationreview.com/*

This video will help change the way you look at nature, following the introductory article on urbanization. It features David Abram's perspective on nature, which is further discussed in the next article.

What is Nature for You?

In the previous video, we have seen, how David Abram sees Nature. But the word "nature" can be interpreted in many different ways. To each of us it might mean slightly different things. Therefore we interviewed people, professionals working with people or in nature, to ask for their own personal perception. We have asked them: What is nature to you and how does it influence your way you deal with difficult moments in your life? Here we summarize the findings of our research, which we have done with councellors, trainers and nature guides – people helping people.

Defining Nature

For defining nature, people answered from different points of view: some people highlighted their personal connection to it (including the vivid description of sensations), while others emphasized the environmental aspects or humans' (and human-made creations) relation with nature or answered from a spiritual point of view.

„Personal" answers mainly include relation to important places (like home, a town with trees, „my grape hill", the great plain, etc.), as well as describing sensations as the way we can recognise if something is nature or not. These include colours (green, blue, red versus the grey of concrete), the touch of soil below the feet, having enough space above – as for example at the plain, where the enormous sky embraces you). Another way to look at it was what „activities" can be done in nature: for example walking outside or having a connection with it. These place the respondent in the role of experiencing (and appreciating) nature in some way.

The „environmental" perspective includes responses that define nature by listing parts of it. Three people highlighted that both insentient and living environment counts as nature. Most frequently (5 times) forest was mentioned, then elements (forms of water, air, earth/soil), followed by creatures (plants, trees and animals), formations (desert, mountains and caves), and finally spatial objects (sun, moon).

The next category was those responses that defined nature in relation to human activity. The most frequently mentioned aspect was that nature is something that was not created by humans, that is untouched (among all the answers this was one of the most highlighted – 6 people mentioned it). This also means for some people that cities cannot be

nature. Others have a different point of view: some poeple think that human creations also can be nature, or at least part of nature – especially if there is a sense of nature there anyway (for example a tree with birds seen from a balcony). An other way to look at nature in relation to humans is already leading to the next category (spiritual): nature is something that fulfills you, that brings silence and create harmony inside.

Finally the spiritual responses defining nature as something that is greater than us (persons or humans in general). It is freedom, infinity, strength. It is reality as it is, the whole universe. And finally, the most common response in the interviews was that we are all part of nature: we, humans and animals, we are all equal, we are little particles of a greater wholeness.

How nature influences the way we deal with challenges?

As for how nature influences them during difficult moments of their life, there were two groups of ideas and experiences: nature impacts the respondents in a way, creating certain feelings and impressions, and it helps people connecting with themselves in these situations. Some people also mentioned a spiritual gain as well.

Participants agreed, that nature has a deep impact on humans beings in difficult situations. Some of them see it that way, that different environments create different impressions and feelings: for example a plain excites you and the sea calms you down. Others highlighted the feeling of safety they experience in nature. It also give great possibilities to experience – for example the infinite movement of the world.

Other responses focused on how nature helps people to connect to themselves. Nearly all of the interviewees agreed that nature let people to be alone, to stay with themselves, to calm down, to meditate and therefore find harmony with themselves. For this effect, they follow different paths – for some, even a place in the city with flowers create peace in their mind. For others it is the lack of internet in nature that helps them to find themselves. Also the silence and the darkness of caves can evoke deep conversations – that stay down there and never continues up on the surface. For someone it is rhythm of her steps that helps her thoughts to have a different rhythm as well. When you are concentrating on the next step, the daily problems disappear and you can be present in the here and now. For many people it is also a place where they can consciously work on themselves, to recharge their batteries and find the right path they want to follow. It can also help with physical healing.

Some people also mentioned that they gain spiritually when in nature. They feel they can connect to the primal energies of nature, through experiencing that the environment rules, and it is a stronger entity than us. This way it also affects the meaning of life.

So now the question is: what is Nature – for you? And how can nature really help? In our next article we discover the Nature Therapy.

Source:

➔ *Franzini, E., Magnano, F., Purita, A., Rossi, A., Gojšić, J., Hudec, G., Ratz, J., Turoczi, L., Suhajda E. V., Vastag Zs. (2018). Restoring Resilience, Connecting to Nature and Self - Reference Frame. Rogers Személyközpontú Oktatásért Alapítvány. Downloadable: https://www.connat.eu/index.php/project-documents/category/5-reference-frame?download=1:reference-frame*

Nature Therapy Against Stress

How nature helps in our mental health?

Research now shows that connecting with ecologically healthy nature has beneficial effects on our mental health, and at the same time, being in nature stimulates our physical activity, since when we spend time outdoors, we tend to move more (Mihók et al., 2021).

Researchers found (Mihók et al., 2021), what all our respondents from the previous article also stated, that connection with nature affects the human psyche and mental functions in the following ways:

- It speeds up recovery from stress
- It improves mood
- It contributes to nervous system regeneration
- It enhances attention and cognitive functions

Overall, it can be said that people who feel more connected to nature are more likely to develop well and be psychologically healthier. Beyond this, strengthening the relationship with nature also supports the protection of natural values (Mihók et al., 2021). According to research, even just the sight of nature can reduce our stress levels, and spending as little as 20 minutes a day in nature is enough to achieve a stress-reducing effect (Hunter et al., 2019).

How Can We Connect Simply and Effectively with Nature?

- Listen to the wonderful sounds of nature, even from recordings! You can find many free audio recordings and videos related to this online.
- Breathe in nature! The immuno-boosting and calming compounds called phytoncides, which contribute to forest bathing benefits, can also be inhaled in the form of essential oils, bringing a drop of nature into your space!
- Meditate in nature! Connecting with nature itself helps us practice mindfulness, which positively impacts stress reduction. A simple forest bathing exercise is spending quiet time, regularly returning to a nearby, easily accessible place to observe nature silently. It

is recommended to do this for 20 to 30 minutes, ideally daily, or at least twice a week, returning to your chosen spot.

- Forest bathing (shinrin-yoku): A slow (usually 2-3 hours), guided walk in the forest done silently and with mindful attention, combining nature walking and mindfulness practice. The guide invites participants to engage in exercises that help focus their full attention on the natural world and immerse themselves in the experience provided by the forest.

- And of course also: do some physical exercise and breathing exercises outdoors. You can find helpful videos for this in the module "Connection with Our Body.

But as the saying says: if the prophet will not go to the mountain, let the mountain come to the prophet. In the next parts of our module we dive into ways to get Nature come to you: first let's see a video on the beneficial connection with our beloved pets.

Sources:

- ➔ *Bach É.: Természetkapcsolat – otthonról, Mindennapi Pszichológia: https://mipszi.hu/cikk/201130-termeszetkapcsolat-otthonrol, utolsó letöltés ideje: 2025. 07. 06.*
- ➔ *Mihók B., Fekete M., Frankó L., Martos T., Pataki Gy., Sallay V., Báldi A.: Természet és lelki egészség, ELKH Ökológiai Kutatóközpont, Vácrátót-Budapest, 2021*
- ➔ *Hunter M. R., Gillespie B. W., Chen S. Y. (2019): Urban Nature Experiences Reduce Stress in the Context of Daily Life Based on Salivary Biomarkers, Frontiers in Psychology, 10:722*
- ➔ *Pikó B.: Egészségszociológia, Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2002*
- ➔ *Zimbardo P., Johnson R., McCann V.: Pszichológia mindenkinek 4. Zavarok, terápiák, stressz, stratégiák, Libri Könyvkiadó Kft., 2018*

Following the article on nature therapy, this video explores the beneficial connection we can have with our beloved pets as a way to bring nature to us. The benefits of having pets at home are a lead-in to discussing animals in the classroom.

Animals in the Classroom?

OK, having pets at home is really beneficial, but can we also introduce its benefits in our workplace – in the school?

Yes, we can. Bringing animals into the classroom is a fascinating opportunity for learning for both the teacher and the pupils. There is of course the real world learning effect for pupils, but there is much more, as we have learned in our previous project, ELENA.

The Power of the Living Corner

Think back to your own school days. Was there a fish tank in the corner? Maybe a hamster cage? These "living corners" are more than just decoration; they're a gateway to a richer, more engaging learning experience.

The core idea is that working with live animals can create powerful emotional experiences that support the development of skills and behavioral changes necessary for a sustainable future. It's a way to reverse the trend of people becoming increasingly separated from the natural world, especially in urban environments. When students interact with animals, they're not just learning facts from a textbook; they're building an emotional bridge to the natural world. This kind of engagement fosters a sense of curiosity, responsibility, and empathy that traditional methods often can't replicate.

What are the benefits?

- **Reduced Stress and Anxiety:** The presence of a calm, friendly dog has been shown to reduce stress reactions in children during stressful tasks, sometimes more effectively than a human presence 6. Stroking a dog, for instance, can activate the oxytocin system, which is linked to promoting calmness and reducing stress and aggression7. Our experiences with previous project ELENA (Experiential Learning and Education for Nature Awareness) we experienced that actually not only dogs, but other animals – chicken, hedgehogs, butterflies and even ants and worms are having this impact! In a participating Georgian school the teachers said that the local ant farm was taken care by those children, who had the most problems with social integration. It increased their popularity and visibility in the schools.

- **Improved Learning and Concentration:** Studies show that the presence of a dog can improve a child's concentration and performance on cognitive tasks, such as reading and memory exercises. This is partly because the non-judgmental nature of animals can lower a child's fear of criticism and increase their focus on the task at hand. Other animals have other impact – for example they increase the level of curiosity about them. In one of the participating Romanian schools kids even gave name to individual ants, and learned a lot about them. In another school children volunteered their free time to take care of the chicken in the schoolyard – meanwhile also learning how to do it. A Hungarian primary school class (of 8 years old) have researched earth worms, and gave a short introduction on them to the Zoo experts. Another story by a teacher: One day I took a bug into the classroom, I put it on the table, and did something in the corner of the room and by the time I turned back, and kids were already observing the bug through a loupe.

- **Enhanced Social-Emotional Skills:** Researches show that regular interaction with a "schooldog" can lead to improved empathy towards animals, better social integration, and a reduction in aggressive behavior, as well as reduction of fear. The dog can act as a catalyst for social interactions and help create a positive, trusting classroom climate. One teacher from Romania reported: "When dead ants stuck on tables were introduced to the kids, they found them disgusting or at least not so interesting. But when we let the children see the living ants through a microscope, they said they are much nicer and cuter. They could observe the details, the small moving the ants made e.g. the way they clean their antennas. And they got amazed". Another one said: "I met a lot of children who were shooting birds when they were young, but through our programs they become devoted animal-protectors."

- **Development of Key Competencies:** Working with animals directly addresss several of core competencies, including:

    - **Responsibility:** You and your students learn to care for another living being and take on the consequences of your actions.

    - **Organization:** Keeping an animal requires planning, setting priorities, and consistently monitoring its well-being.

    - **Self-reflection:** The immediate feedback you get from an animal's behaviour can help you understand your own actions and emotions, leading to greater self-awareness.

Navigating the "How To" and Legalities

Bringing an animal into your school isn't as simple as just walking it through the door. It requires careful planning and a thorough understanding of the local regulations.

Key considerations for teachers:

- **Animal Welfare:** You must ensure the animal's well-being is a top priority. This includes providing adequate nourishment, a suitable living space that meets its species-specific needs, and daily checks on its health and environment.

- **Student Health and Safety:** It's your responsibility to ensure the safety of both the animal and the students. This involves screening for allergies and establishing clear rules of conduct for how children should interact with the animal.

- **Legal and Institutional Requirements:** Check with your school administration and local

health authorities. They will set the conditions and give you permission. You'll need to be aware of regulations regarding the keeping of animals, mandatory immunizations, and the handling of any species-specific issues. For instance many wild animal species are protected and require special permission from a conservation authority to be kept in a classroom.

- **Curricular Integration:** The most successful and sustainable animal-assisted learning happens when it's integrated into the curriculum, not just an add-on. Think about how to incorporate the animal into subjects like natural sciences, biology, or even ethics.

So, are you still hesitating? It's time to take in a new Vitamine: Vitamine N. We are going to deal with it at our next article.

Resources

- ➔ *Beetz, A. (2013). Socio-emotional correlates of a schooldog-teacher-team in the classroom31*
- ➔ *ELENA Project - Experiential Learning and Education for Nature Awareness:*
- ➔ *Competency Framework: ELENA Project – Core Competency Frame, 2015. www.elena-project.eu*
- ➔ *ELENA_Hungarian_baseline_study_EN: Péter Szandi-Varga, Zsolt Molnár, Katalin Csizmazia, Levente Turóczi (2014): Baseline Study on Biodiversity Education using Living Animals in Schools in Hungary. ELENA Project Experiential Learning and Education for Nature Awareness. www.elena-project.eu*
- ➔ *ELENA_International_Study_EN: Mihaela Antofie, Christian Stettmer, Tanja Berthold, Peter Sturm, Katalin Czippan, Wolfram Adelmann (2015): ELENA Project – International study and Comparative report www.elena-project.eu*
- ➔ *Wohlfarth, R., Mutschler, B., Beetz, A., & Schleider, K. (2014). An investigation into the efficacy of therapy dogs on reading performance in 6-7 year old children37.*

A short lecture from Dr Eva Virag Suhajda, ecolinguist, on how talking about nature determines the thinking about nature.

The Nature Principle – „Vitamin N"

After talking so much about the positive impacts of Vitamin C, B, and more in the previous module about self-care, it's really time to look at a new „vitamin", what Richard Louv is proposing us: Vitamin N, as Vitamin Nature, from his new book: The Nature Principle.

Louv builds this new book on his previous work about "nature-deficit disorder" by focusing on how adults can restore their connection with the natural world. Louv's main points can be summed up in a few key ideas, which he often calls "principles" or "precepts."

The "Nature Principle" and "Vitamin N"

The "Nature Principle" is the idea that reconnecting with nature is essential for human health, well-being, and even survival. It's a response to a world that is becoming increasingly high-tech and disconnected from the natural environment. Louv champions the concept of "Vitamin N," or "Vitamin Nature," as a metaphor for the restorative powers of the outdoors. He argues that just as we need vitamins for our physical health, we need regular doses of nature for our mental and physical well-being.

The Hybrid Mind and Human Restoration

Louv isn't anti-technology. In fact, he argues for a "hybrid mind"—a state where we use technology to enhance our connection with nature, rather than replace it. We don't have to choose between a high-tech life and a nature-rich one. We can use technology to organize family nature clubs, research local ecosystems, or share our outdoor experiences. This leads to the idea of human restoration, which is the ultimate goal of the "New Nature Movement." It's about restoring not just the environment, but ourselves in the process.

The "New Nature Movement" and Community

Louv also emphasizes that reconnecting with nature is a collective effort, not just an individual one. He proposes a "New Nature Movement" that goes beyond traditional environmentalism. It's about actively creating nature where we live, work, and play, even in urban settings. This includes things like biophilic design in our homes and offices (incorporating natural elements), creating pocket parks, and encouraging urban agriculture. This movement, Louv argues, will help build "human/nature social capital", enriching communities by redefining them to include all living things.

The ideas of Louv about creating nature, where we live, has inspired our next video about gardening and the stress-relieving power of contact with plants. The next step in our module about Connecting to Nature. Enjoy.

Source:

➔ *Richard Louv (2011). The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder. Algonquin Books.*

Inspired by the idea of creating nature where we live, this video discusses gardening as a proven therapeutic tool for relaxing the mind and body. It highlights how even small indoor or terrace gardens can reduce stress and improve mental health.

Activating the Senses in Nature: A Solo Mindfulness Exercise

This exercise is designed to help you connect with yourself and the natural world around you through mindful sensory engagement. It is adapted for a single person to practice in a quiet outdoor setting.

Goal of the Exercise

The primary goal is to achieve a state of calmness, relaxation, and heightened awareness by consciously engaging each of your senses. By focusing on the present moment and the subtleties of your natural surroundings, you can quiet the noise of our fast-paced world, fostering a deeper connection with yourself and the environment.

Instructions

Find a comfortable and safe spot in a natural setting, such as a park, forest, or your own backyard. The entire exercise should take about 20 minutes.

1. **Grounding Breath**
   Begin by standing or sitting in a comfortable position. Take three deep breaths: inhale slowly through your nose and exhale fully through your mouth. With each exhale, imagine roots growing from the soles of your feet, anchoring you deep into the earth.

2. **Sense Meditation**
   - **Hearing:** Close your eyes and bring your attention to the sounds around you. First, identify the sound that is farthest away. Then, listen for the closest sound. Continue this, trying to distinguish different sounds and their directions without judgment.
   - **Sight** (Owl Eyes): Open your eyes and fix your gaze on a point directly in front of you. Extend your arms forward, wiggling your fingers. While keeping your eyes fixed straight ahead, slowly move your arms out to your sides until they are no longer in your direct line of sight. Wiggle your fingers again. Notice how much you can perceive in your peripheral vision.
   - **Touch** (Barefoot Walk): If you are in a safe area, take off your shoes and walk slowly and silently. Pay attention to the texture of the ground beneath your feet. If you encounter a twig or leaf, try to step on it without making a sound, noticing the sensation and the control required.

3. **Reflection**
   After completing the sensory exercises, take a few moments to stand or sit quietly. Notice how you feel. Do you perceive your surroundings differently? Acknowledge the increased awareness of what you can see, hear, and feel compared to when you started.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

Engaging in this mindfulness practice offers significant benefits for managing stress and preventing burnout.

- **Promotes Calmness and Relaxation:** The deliberate, slow pace of the exercise and the focus on deep breathing helps to activate the body's relaxation response, reducing physiological symptoms of stress.

- **Enhances Mindfulness:** By directing your attention to your senses, you practice mindfulness—the art of being fully present in the moment. This helps to interrupt the cycle of ruminative thoughts and worries that often contribute to stress and feelings of being overwhelmed.

- **Reduces Mental Fatigue:** Stepping away from the constant stimulation and demands of daily life to immerse yourself in nature allows your mind to rest and recharge. This mental break can improve focus and prevent the cognitive exhaustion associated with burnout.

- **Fosters Self-Connection:** The exercise encourages you to "get in contact with themselves". This reconnection can help you become more attuned to your own needs and limits, which is a key component of preventing burnout.

Meet My Tree

This exercise is designed for two people to deepen their connection with nature and each other through a playful, sensory experience. It encourages trust, mindfulness, and a novel way of perceiving the environment. For this exercise ask somebody to come with you in the nature!

Goal of the Exercise

The main goal is to strengthen your connection with nature by using all of your senses, particularly touch and smell, while your sense of sight is removed. This activity aims to develop trust between partners, enhance sensory awareness, and offer a unique way to experience the natural world by comparing a tree's felt "image" with its actual appearance.

Instructions

This exercise should be conducted in a safe, wooded area with a variety of trees and will take approximately 20–30 minutes to complete.

Materials Needed:

- One blindfold (a scarf works well)

Procedure:

The exercise is performed in two rounds so each person has a chance to be both the "guide" and the "explorer".

Round 1:

1. **Designate Roles:** Decide who will be the guide first and who will be the blindfolded explorer.
2. **Blindfold the Explorer:** The explorer puts on the blindfold. It's important to ensure they are comfortable. If a blindfold causes discomfort, closing the eyes can be an alternative.
3. **Meet the Tree:** The guide gently leads the explorer to a specific tree. To make it more challenging and fun, the guide can spin the explorer around a few times first to disorient them slightly.
4. **Explore the Tree:** The explorer uses their hands and sense of smell to get to know the tree. They should feel its texture, size, and any unique features like lumps, bumps, or branches, creating a mental map of it. The guide should allow ample time for this sensory connection.
5. **Return to Start:** The guide carefully leads the explorer back to the starting point, disorienting them again along the way.
6. **Find the Tree:** The explorer removes the blindfold and, using the memory of their sensory experience, tries to identify the tree they just "met".

Round 2:

7. **Swap Roles:** The partners switch roles and repeat the entire process, allowing the guide to become the explorer.

Debrief:

After both partners have had a turn, take a few minutes to share the experience. Discuss what it was like to be blindfolded, to trust your partner, and to try to find the tree.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

This exercise serves as a powerful tool for mental well-being and building resilience against stress and burnout.

- **Promotes Mindfulness and Reduces Overthinking:** By removing sight, the exercise forces a shift in focus to the immediate sensory experience of touch and smell. This act of mindfulness grounds you in the present moment, providing a break from persistent, stress-inducing thoughts.

- **Deepens Connection with Nature:** Engaging with nature in such a tactile and unconventional way fosters a stronger bond with the environment. This connection is widely recognized for its restorative qualities, helping to lower cortisol levels and reduce feelings of mental fatigue.

- **Builds Trust and Social Connection:** The act of guiding and being guided builds a significant level of trust between partners. Strong social bonds are a key protective factor against burnout, combating feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of mutual support.

- **Encourages Playfulness and Positive Emotions:** Stepping out of your comfort zone in a safe and playful manner can generate positive feelings and a sense of accomplishment. This kind of restorative “play” is essential for replenishing mental and emotional resources drained by chronic stress.

Nature Mandala

This creative exercise is designed for you to foster a deeper connection with the natural world through the meditative process of creating art. It is a quiet, reflective practice that uses found natural objects.

Goal of the Exercise

The primary goal is to connect with your innermost creative self and build a positive attitude towards nature. By mindfully collecting and arranging natural items into a mandala, you can experience the joy of creation and appreciate the beauty of the natural environment. This practice is a form of self-reflection and a way to create personal meaning.

Instructions

This solo exercise should take about 20- 30 minutes and can be done in any outdoor space with access to natural materials, or even indoors with pre-collected items.

Procedure:

1. **Mindful Collection:** Go outside into a garden, park, or forest. Spend some time walking and quietly collecting natural objects that catch your eye, such as leaves, flowers, fruits, nuts, twigs, or stones. Use this time as a moment for self-reflection.

2. **Prepare Your Canvas:** Find a clear spot on the ground or use a large sheet of paper as the base for your mandala.

3. **Create Your Mandala:** Arrange the items you have collected into a circular, symmetrical design. There is no right or wrong way to do this; let your intuition and creativity guide the process. This part of the exercise is best done in silence to deepen the creative flow. You might find it helpful to play some relaxing music.

4. **Quiet Observation:** Once your mandala is complete, take some time to look at it in silence. Observe the patterns, colors, and textures. Reflect on what the created image means to you and what message it might carry.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

Creating a nature mandala is a potent practice for managing stress and building resilience against burnout.

- **Promotes Mindfulness and Calm:** The process of searching for materials and carefully arranging them requires focused attention, which is a form of mindfulness. This helps to quiet a busy mind, reduce mental chatter, and induce a state of calm.

- **Encourages Creative Expression:** The exercise provides an outlet for non-verbal, creative self-expression. Engaging your creativity in this way can be a joyful and restorative experience, helping to counteract the emotional exhaustion that often accompanies burnout.

- **Deepens Connection to Nature:** Spending time in nature and interacting with it in such an intentional way has proven therapeutic benefits. It helps to ground you in the present moment and fosters a sense of peace and well-being.

- **Fosters Self-Reflection:** The silent and focused nature of the activity allows for introspection. Reflecting on the meaning of your creation can provide insights into your own feelings and inner state, promoting self-awareness, which is a critical component of managing stress effectively.

Nature Pictures

This exercise is designed to help you connect with nature through the simple, joyful act of creating a small piece of art.

Goal of the Exercise

The primary goal is to foster a connection with nature and experience the joy and liberation of creativity. By making a small work of art from natural materials, you can experience the powerful and restorative connection between art and the natural world.

Instructions

This activity is suitable for adults, youth, and children, and takes approximately 15–30 minutes to complete. Its simplicity makes it an excellent exercise to do with pupils in a classroom or as a family activity.

Materials Needed:

- Cardboard or thick paper (e.g., 15x8 cm)
- A self-adhesive transparent sheet (or "vignette") or wide double-sided tape
- Scissors

Procedure:

1. **Create Your Sticky Window:** Begin by cutting a shape, such as an oval or rectangle, out of the center of your cardboard to make a frame. Stick this cardboard frame onto the adhesive sheet, ensuring the sticky side faces up through the "window" you've cut. You now have your canvas.
2. **Take a Contemplative Walk:** Take your "sticky window" with you on a 10-minute walk through a garden, a park, or even just your neighborhood.
3. **Gather and Create:** As you walk, look for small natural elements that catch your eye. This could be leaves, flower petals, seeds, small twigs, or blades of grass. Stick these items directly onto the sticky surface of your frame to compose a small picture. Enjoy the creative process without pressure or judgment.
4. **Reflect on Your Art:** After your walk, take a moment to admire your creation. You can reflect on how you felt during the process of making your nature picture.

Note for Use with Pupils:

This activity can be very easily adapted for use with pupils in a school setting. It is a simple, low-cost way to encourage creativity, mindfulness, and a connection to the natural environment.

Benefits for Stress-Reduction and Burnout Prevention

This exercise provides a number of benefits for managing stress and preventing burnout:

- **Promotes Mindfulness:** The process of walking and mindfully selecting small items from nature helps to ground you in the present

moment. This contemplation can quiet the mind and reduce feelings of stress.

- F**osters a Connection to Nature:** Engaging directly with natural elements has a calming effect. This connection can help lower stress levels and combat the mental fatigue associated with burnout.

- **Encourages Joyful Creativity:** The exercise is designed to be a liberating and joyful creative outlet. Engaging in play and creativity is essential for replenishing emotional and mental resources.

- **Provides a Sense of Accomplishment:** Creating a small, beautiful piece of art provides a quick and tangible sense of achievement, which can boost mood and contribute to a positive sense of self.

Creativity: Connecting to Our Positive Powers

Introductory video to the module.

This video challenges the myth that creativity is a rare gift, instead presenting it as a muscle that anyone can strengthen through practice. It broadens the definition to include “everyday creativity,” emphasizing that all it takes to develop it is curiosity and the courage to try something new.

Creativity as Self-Discovery: Finding Your Inner Voice

In the previous video, we debunked the 'creative type' myth—creativity isn't a rare gift but a trainable muscle. In this article, we turn inward: you'll see how creativity begins with self-awareness and personal meaning—before it becomes inspiration for others.

In the fast-paced reality of teaching, creativity is often seen as a tool for lesson planning or engaging students. But before it can inspire others, creativity must start as a deeply personal process — a way to reconnect with yourself and uncover the values, dreams, and strengths that make you unique.

Creativity Beyond Art

When we hear "creative," we may think of artists, musicians, or writers. Yet creativity is not limited to the arts. It is a mindset — the ability to see new possibilities, make unexpected connections, and approach challenges with fresh perspectives. For teachers, this can mean finding a new way to explain a concept, creating a classroom ritual that brings joy, or designing a solution to a problem no one else has solved.

Research by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, known for his work on flow, shows that creative engagement can lead to moments where time feels suspended, focus is effortless, and a sense of deep satisfaction emerges. In such moments, we are not just producing something — we are meeting ourselves.

The Role of Self-Awareness

True creative power grows when we understand ourselves — our motivations, values, and emotional triggers. Without self-awareness, creativity can become performative, driven by others' expectations rather than authentic expression.

Self-discovery through creativity might begin with simple questions:

- What am I curious about right now?
- When do I feel most alive in my work?

- Which activities make me lose track of time?

Answering these questions creates a foundation for a creative practice that is sustainable and fulfilling — not just another item on the to-do list.

Letting Go of Perfection

One of the biggest barriers to creativity is the fear of imperfection. Teachers often hold themselves to impossibly high standards, but perfectionism can freeze creative impulses before they even have a chance to grow.

Brené Brown's research on vulnerability reminds us that creativity requires courage — the willingness to show up without guarantees. A sketch, a poem, a new teaching method may never be "perfect," but each attempt is a step toward discovering your authentic voice.

Creativity as a Form of Self-Care

Engaging in creative acts without external pressure can be profoundly restorative. Whether it's journaling for five minutes in the morning, experimenting with a new recipe, or taking photos during a walk, these activities nourish the inner self. Over time, they become a source of resilience, helping teachers stay connected to their passion for education even during stressful times.

Try This

For one week, dedicate 15 minutes a day to a personal creative activity — something unrelated to your professional duties. Don't aim for productivity or share your results unless you want to. Simply notice how it feels to create for yourself. At the end of the week, reflect:

- Did I learn something new about myself?
- Did I feel more energized or calm afterward?
- How might this personal practice influence my work with others?

Creativity is not only a professional skill; it's a personal compass. By using it to discover who we are, we strengthen our ability to bring authenticity, inspiration, and humanity into every aspect of our lives.

If creativity grows from authentic contact with yourself, it helps to know how joy and safety switch on the brain's creative systems. In the next video, you'll meet the neuroscience: dopamine, a prefrontal 'warm-up,' and why lightness invites ideas.

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- ➔ *Kaufman, S. B., & Gregoire, C. (2015). Wired to create: Unraveling the mysteries of the creative mind. Perigee Books.*
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This video explains the neuroscience behind creativity, arguing that joy and a sense of safety switch on the brain's creative machinery by releasing dopamine. Play is presented not as a distraction but as a crucial warm-up that primes the mind to see new possibilities and connect distant ideas.

Curiosity as the Spark: How Play Opens the Door to Creativity

In the previous video, you saw that joy and a sense of safety literally prime the brain to connect distant ideas. This article gets practical: it focuses on curiosity and small playful experiments that open new pathways of thinking.

Many of us think creativity begins with inspiration, but often it starts with something simpler — curiosity. The willingness to explore without knowing exactly where it will lead is the foundation of innovation, joy, and personal growth.

The Power of "What If?"

Curiosity thrives when we ask open questions without rushing to find the "right" answer. Psychologists call this divergent thinking — the ability to see multiple possibilities instead of one fixed solution. Children do this naturally: a cardboard box becomes a rocket, a dragon's cave, or a quiet reading nook. Somewhere along the way, adults trade this openness for efficiency. While efficiency gets things done, it can quietly suffocate our creative spirit.

Play as a Gateway

Play offers a safe space to let curiosity breathe. When you doodle without planning, rearrange your desk just for fun, or try a recipe without measuring, you're giving your brain permission to explore. Neuroscience shows that play activates the brain's reward circuits, encouraging risk-taking and flexible thinking — both essential for creativity.

Letting Go of the "Useful" Trap

One of the main barriers to creative exploration is the belief that everything we do must have a clear purpose. But unstructured play is a form of mental cross-training — it strengthens problem-solving skills by giving your mind new patterns to work with. In other words, wasting time creatively is not wasted at all.

Making Curiosity a Habit

You don't need large blocks of time to reignite curiosity. Try:

- Asking yourself one "What if...?" question a day and exploring the answer.

- Changing your perspective — literally. Work from a different spot, take a new route home, or observe a familiar place in silence.

- Trying an activity from your childhood without judgment — whether that's building something from LEGO bricks or finger painting.

The Emotional Payoff

When curiosity becomes a regular part of life, stress feels lighter. Problems become puzzles. Even setbacks become opportunities to ask, "What can I learn here?" Instead of seeing creativity as a rare gift, you begin to live it as a daily practice — one that refreshes the mind, reduces burnout, and reconnects you to the simple joy of being alive.

So the next time you catch yourself stuck in the loop of "shoulds" and "musts," pause and ask: What am I curious about right now? Let that question lead you — not to the most efficient path, but to the most alive one.

As curiosity and play ignite creative thinking, hidden blockers often creep in. In the next video, we'll name these silent killers of creativity—perfectionism, hurry, criticism—and show how to weaken them in everyday work.

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- *Neff, K. (2011). Self-compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself. William Morrow.*
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This resource identifies the quiet forces that suppress innovation, such as perfectionism, constant criticism, and lack of time. The video asserts that becoming aware of these “silent killers” and creating a psychologically safe environment is essential for allowing creativity the “room to breathe” it needs to flourish.

From Self-Doubt to Creative Confidence: Reclaiming Your Inner Voice

In the previous video, we examined the 'silent killers' of creativity. This article offers a personal antidote: quieting the inner critic, building creative courage through small tries, and practicing self-compassion that strengthens resilience and motivation.

For many teachers, creativity feels like a distant luxury — something reserved for those with "natural talent" or extra time. But in reality, creative confidence isn't an inborn trait. It's a muscle, built slowly through practice, curiosity, and the courage to try again after setbacks.

The Inner Critic's Whisper

Self-doubt often begins with a quiet voice: "What if this isn't good enough?" or "I'm not the creative type." Over time, these thoughts can become barriers, not only to innovation but to personal joy. Stanford researchers David and Tom Kelley, in their work on creative confidence, show that fear of judgment is one of the main reasons people avoid creative expression. The more we listen to that inner critic, the more our creative world shrinks.

Small Wins Build Big Shifts

The path to creative confidence doesn't start with a masterpiece. It begins with small, low-pressure experiments — doodling while you wait for your coffee, testing a playful classroom activity without worrying about perfection, or writing a story no one will ever read. These micro-moments teach your brain that creative risk is safe. With each one, the voice of self-doubt gets quieter.

Reframing Failure

Every creative person — from artists to scientists — has a long trail of failed attempts behind their successes. In fact, research on learning and innovation shows that the quantity of attempts often predicts the quality of outcomes. The more we try, the better we get.

Instead of seeing failure as proof you "aren't creative," you can see it as evidence that you are doing the work. Brené Brown calls this "daring greatly" — showing up without the guarantee of success.

The Role of Self-Compassion

Self-compassion isn't about letting yourself off the hook; it's about creating the emotional safety needed to keep experimenting. Psychologist Kristin Neff's research demonstrates that self-kindness fuels resilience and long-term motivation far more effectively than harsh self-criticism. If you wouldn't say it to a student, don't say it to yourself.

Creativity as Identity, Not Outcome

When you start to see creativity not as a product, but as part of who you are, something shifts. You're no longer trying to "prove" your creativity — you're simply living it. That identity carries into the classroom, the staff meeting, and even how you problem-solve in your own life.

Try This

Choose a small, playful creative act you've been avoiding — something you've told yourself you're "not good at" — and do it for 10 minutes today. Afterward, jot down:

- How did it feel to start?
- What surprised you?
- What might you try next, without pressure to be "good"?

Creative confidence isn't about removing all self-doubt. It's about taking action with it — and realizing that your voice, your perspective, and your ideas matter more than you think.

Creative confidence grows faster when we lean on others—on dialogue, diverse perspectives, and shared making. In the next video, you'll see why creativity is not 'I create,' but 'we create.'

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This video debunks the myth of the "lone genius," arguing instead that the most innovative ideas are born from conversation and collaboration. It introduces the concept of "collective intelligence," where diverse groups outperform individuals, positioning creativity as a social act of "we create," not just "I create".

The Quiet Power of Creative Rituals: Building Inner Strength Through Consistency

In the previous video, creativity moved from a solitary room into the space of relationships—where ideas meet and grow. This article closes the loop: small, steady rituals that tell your brain 'this is creative time,' lower stress, and turn creativity into a habit.

When people think of creativity, they often imagine bursts of inspiration — sudden, brilliant ideas that arrive uninvited. But many of the most resilient and innovative minds build their creativity not from chaos, but from steady, intentional rituals.

Why rituals matter for creativity

A creative ritual is any small, repeated action that signals to your brain: this is my space for imagination. It could be brewing tea before writing, listening to a certain playlist before painting, or taking a short walk before brainstorming. Neuroscience research shows that rituals reduce performance anxiety and shift the mind into a focused, open state — the same state in which creative problem-solving thrives.

Inner strength through steady habits

Resilience is often built in quiet ways. By committing to a small, consistent creative act, you strengthen your ability to stay present, to return to yourself even in stressful times. This isn't about producing masterpieces; it's about creating a dependable space where your mind can breathe and wander freely.

Rituals as an antidote to stress

In high-pressure periods, our first instinct is to abandon "non-essential" activities. Yet, research in Frontiers in Psychology suggests that maintaining small creative rituals can lower stress hormones and improve emotional regulation. Think of them as anchors — small, steady points in your week that ground you.

How to create your own ritual

1. **Choose something enjoyable** – The ritual should feel like a gift, not a chore.

2. **Keep it short** – Even 5–10 minutes can have an impact.

3. **Repeat consistently** – Same time, same place, or same cue helps build the habit.

4. **Protect it fiercely** – Treat this time as a non-negotiable appointment with yourself.

The ripple effect

As your ritual becomes second nature, it quietly shifts your mindset. You start approaching challenges with more flexibility and confidence. You become less reactive, more resourceful. In the long run, these moments of consistent creativity weave resilience into your everyday life.

Creativity isn't only about what you produce. It's also about the person you become in the process. And through rituals, you give yourself the steady ground from which your brightest ideas can grow.

Well done—you've completed Module 6. Choose one mini-practice for the week (e.g., a 10-minute 'play warm-up' before a meeting, a 15-minute no-judgment brainstorm, or a daily micro creative ritual) and schedule it. Small, repeated actions build a durable creative identity.

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The "Try Something Different" Challenge

Goal of the Exercise

The goal of this challenge is to intentionally break out of your daily routines to strengthen your "creativity muscle." By introducing novelty and small, manageable changes, you build creative confidence, demonstrate that creativity is an accessible skill, and open your mind to new ways of thinking and problem-solving.

Instructions

For one full week, commit to doing one small thing differently each day. The key is to choose low-stakes activities where the outcome doesn't matter, allowing you to focus on the process of trying something new.

1. **Plan Your Changes:** At the beginning of the week, you might want to brainstorm a few simple ways you can alter your routine.

2. **Execute Daily:** Each day, pick one thing to change. Examples include:
   - Taking a completely new route on your commute to or from work.
   - Listening to a genre of music you would normally never choose.
   - Brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand.
   - If you're a teacher, holding a portion of a lesson in a different location, like a hallway or outdoors.
   - Trying a new recipe or ordering something different at your usual coffee shop.

3. **Reflect Briefly:** At the end of each day, take just a minute to notice how the change felt. Was it uncomfortable, exciting, or did it lead to any unexpected observations?

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Reduces Monotony:** Burnout is often fueled by a sense of monotony and being "stuck." Introducing novelty, even in small doses, can make your days feel more interesting and less draining.

- **Builds Resilience:** This exercise trains your brain to be more comfortable with change and uncertainty. This builds mental flexibility, which helps you better manage the stress that comes with unexpected challenges.

- **Lowers Performance Anxiety:** By choosing low-stakes changes, you practice taking creative risks without the fear of failure. This can reduce the overall performance anxiety that contributes to stress.

- **Promotes a Sense of Agency:** Actively choosing to alter your routine reinforces a sense of control over your life and environment, which is a powerful psychological buffer against feelings of helplessness that can lead to burnout.

Personal Creative Time (Self-Discovery Practice)

Goal of the Exercise

This practice is about carving out dedicated time for creative self-care, completely disconnected from professional obligations or the need for a "productive" outcome. The goal is to reconnect with your own interests, curiosities, and inner voice, using creativity as a tool for self-discovery and personal replenishment.

Instructions

1. **Schedule the Time:** For one week, block out 15 minutes in your calendar each day for your "Personal Creative Time." Treat this as a non-negotiable appointment with yourself.

2. **Choose a Pressure-Free Activity:** Select a creative activity that is just for you. It should not be related to your job or any external expectation. Ideas include:
   - Journaling: Write freely without worrying about grammar or structure.
   - Sketching or Doodling: Draw whatever comes to mind without trying to create a masterpiece.
   - Playing with a Recipe: Experiment with ingredients without the pressure of making a perfect meal.
   - Mindful Photography: Go for a short walk and take pictures of things that catch your eye, using only your phone.

3. **Focus on the Process, Not the Product:** During these 15 minutes, your only goal is to be engaged in the creative act itself. If you find your inner critic appearing, gently remind yourself that this is play, not work.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Facilitates Active Rest:** Burnout is a state of deep exhaustion. Engaging in a creative activity that you enjoy is a form of "active rest" that can be more restorative than passive activities like scrolling on your phone.

- **Provides an Emotional Outlet:** Creative expression can be a powerful way to process emotions that you may not have words for, helping to release stored stress and tension.

- **Reinforces Identity Outside of Work:** Burnout can often occur when your identity becomes too enmeshed with your job. Nurturing personal creative interests helps to foster a stronger, more resilient sense of self.

- **Replenishes Mental Resources:** Focusing on a low-pressure, enjoyable task can help to restore the cognitive resources that are depleted by high-stress work, improving your overall focus and well-being.

The 10-Minute Playful Experiment

Goal of the Exercise

The goal is to directly confront and quiet your inner critic by engaging in a short, time-bound, and playful creative act. By making the stakes incredibly low, you teach your brain that creative risk-taking is safe and that "failure" is simply part of the process, thereby building creative resilience.

Instructions

1. **Identify a Creative Fear:** Think of a simple, creative activity you've been avoiding because you believe you're "not good at it." This could be drawing, writing a poem, or even dancing.

2. **Set a Timer:** Set a timer for just 10 minutes. The short duration is key, as it makes the task feel less intimidating.

3. **Engage in the Activity:** For those 10 minutes, give yourself permission to do the activity playfully and imperfectly. For example:
   - Doodling: Fill a page with scribbles, shapes, or silly cartoons.
   - Writing: Write a short, nonsensical story that you know no one else will ever read.
   - Building: Use LEGO bricks or other materials to build something without a plan.

4. **Acknowledge Completion:** When the timer goes off, simply stop. Acknowledge that you did the thing you were avoiding. There is no need to judge the outcome.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Combats Perfectionism:** Perfectionism is a major driver of stress and burnout. This exercise is a direct antidote, as it encourages you to embrace imperfection in a controlled, safe environment.

- **Lowers Performance Anxiety:** By proving to yourself that you can survive a "bad" drawing or a "silly" story, you lower the anxiety associated with creative tasks and reduce the fear of judgment.

- **Provides a Mental "Reset":** A 10-minute playful break can be a powerful way to shift your mental state, interrupting a cycle of stress and providing a quick boost of positive emotion.

- **Builds Courage:** The more you practice these small acts of creative courage, the more confident you will become in taking on larger creative challenges, which can make your work feel more manageable and less stressful.

Invite Someone In (Collaborative Creativity)

Goal of the Exercise

This exercise is designed to challenge the myth of the "lone genius" and demonstrate the power of collaborative creativity. The goal is to experience firsthand how inviting another perspective into your process can break down creative blocks, enrich your ideas, and foster a sense of connection.

Instructions

1. **Choose a Creative Task:** Select a project or problem you are currently working on. It could be anything from planning a lesson to brainstorming a new personal project.

2. **Invite Collaboration:** Find one person—a colleague, a friend, or a family member—and invite them into your process for a brief time.

3. **Ask for Open-Ended Input:** Instead of asking for a solution, ask for generative input. You could say:
   - "What's a 'what if...?' question you have about this?"
   - "What's a wild or unexpected suggestion you could offer?"
   - "What does this idea make you think of?"

4. **Listen with Openness:** For a few moments, let go of your ownership of the idea. Listen to their input without judgment or immediate dismissal. See what new connections or possibilities emerge from the shared conversation.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Reduces Isolation:** Burnout is often accompanied by feelings of isolation. This exercise actively builds social connection and reminds you that you don't have to solve every problem alone.

- **Lightens the Mental Load:** Sharing a creative challenge can make it feel less burdensome. The input from another person can provide a fresh burst of energy and perspective when you are feeling stuck and frustrated.

- **Fosters a Supportive Environment:** Regularly practicing this kind of collaborative creativity can help to build a culture of mutual support, which is a key protective factor against workplace stress and burnout.

- **Breaks Through Creative Blocks:** Feeling stuck is a significant source of stress. A new perspective can often provide the key to unlocking a problem, reducing frustration and renewing your sense of momentum.

A "Play First" Warm-Up

Goal of the Exercise

This exercise uses the neuroscience of play to prime your brain for creative and innovative thinking. The goal is to intentionally cultivate a state of joy and lightness before tackling a difficult or demanding task, thereby increasing your motivation, curiosity, and ability to make novel connections.

Instructions

1. **Identify a Challenging Task:** Think of a task on your to-do list that requires creative problem-solving, brainstorming, or deep focus.

2. **Choose a Playful Warm-Up:** Before you begin that task, set aside five minutes for a purely playful activity. The only rule is that it should bring a sense of fun and lightness. Examples include:
   - A Word Game: Play a quick round of a word association game with yourself or a colleague.
   - A Silly Drawing Challenge: Try to draw a familiar object with your eyes closed or using your non-dominant hand.
   - Listen to an Upbeat Song: Put on a song that makes you want to dance and allow yourself to move for a few minutes.

3. **Transition to the Task:** After the five-minute warm-up, immediately transition into your challenging task. Notice if your mindset feels any different.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Boosts Positive Neurochemicals:** Play and joy are known to boost dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with motivation and curiosity. This can counteract the effects of the stress hormone cortisol, making you feel more engaged and less stressed.

- **Lowers the Barrier to Entry:** A challenging task can feel intimidating, leading to procrastination and stress. Starting with play lowers the mental barrier, making it easier to get started.

- **Shifts Your Mindset:** This warm-up helps to shift your mental state from one of pressure and demand to one of curiosity and possibility. This can make the work itself feel less like a chore and more like a creative challenge.

- **Prevents Mental Fatigue:** Taking short, playful breaks before and during demanding work can help to prevent the mental exhaustion that leads to burnout, keeping your mind fresh and engaged.

Establish a Creative Ritual

Goal of the Exercise

The goal of this exercise is to build a consistent and sustainable creative practice by harnessing the power of habit. By creating a small, repeated ritual, you signal to your brain that it is time to enter a creative mode, reducing performance anxiety and creating a dependable mental space for your ideas to emerge.

Instructions

1. **Design Your Ritual:** Choose a small, simple, and enjoyable action that you can perform before you begin any creative work. The ritual should be something you look forward to.
    - Choose a Cue: The action will be a cue to your brain. Examples include brewing a specific type of tea, lighting a candle, listening to the same song, or doing a few simple stretches.
    - Keep it Short: The ritual itself should be brief, around 5-10 minutes. Its purpose is to be a gateway, not a form of procrastination.

2. **Practice Consistency:** Repeat this ritual every single time you sit down to do creative work. Consistency is what builds the neural association.

3. **Protect the Time:** Treat your creative time, including the ritual, as an important appointment. This helps to reinforce its value and protect it from other demands.

Benefits for Stress Reduction and Burnout Prevention

- **Reduces Performance Anxiety:** When the creative process is preceded by a familiar ritual, it can feel less daunting. The ritual becomes a comforting entry point, signaling that it is safe to be creative and letting go of the pressure to perform.

- **Lowers Stress Through Predictability:** Routines and rituals are calming to the nervous system because they create a sense of predictability and control. This can lower overall stress levels, especially when facing an uncertain creative task.

- **Automates the "Getting Started" Phase:** One of the most stressful parts of creative work is often the blank page. A ritual automates the process of getting started, helping you to bypass that initial resistance and move more quickly into a state of creative flow.

- **Carves Out Restorative Space:** By formalizing your creative time with a ritual, you are consciously carving out a space for restorative work that is separate from other life pressures. This is a critical practice for preventing the chronic stress that leads to burnout.

Move &
Play
the
Stress
Away