

## Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is connected with performance, resilience, empathy & happiness  
 Rest your hand gently on the part of the body where you feel love or gratitude  
 Imagine feeling kindness for yourself  
 Just be with any discomfort until you can actually feel some kindness for yourself  
 or... smile gently at the person in the mirror until you feel just a bit of kindness  
 or... make a mental list of the people you love and speak their names in at the end



"I just want my child to be happy"

## Discomfort is normal

Working with discomfort is a skill  
 Awareness and acceptance of discomfort is a powerful practice  
 Effort does not require struggle



## Posture

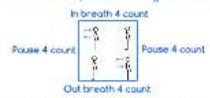
Open your chest & shoulders  
 Feel your feet on the ground  
 Breathe deeply & smile



Connect with gratitude  
 Wish others well  
 Marvel that you exist

## Breathing

The breath is a powerful self-regulation tool

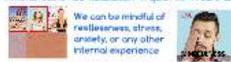


Allow your belly to fall away from your body on the in-breath  
 Bring your belly back toward your spine on the out-breath

## Mindfulness

The skillful use of attention  
 Conscious awareness & acceptance of what is present

Mindfulness is not: Relaxation. A quick fix. A cure-all



We can be mindful of restlessness, stress, anxiety, or any other internal experience

Mindfulness can create space to accept feelings & thoughts instead of clinging or avoiding  
Photo by David La Tourette for iStockphoto.com

# The Opposite of Anxiety

## Building Unconditional Confidence in Our Children

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## Language

"Tell me more"  
 "Let me see if I get this"  
 "That's normal"  
 "I trust that you can deal with whatever happens"  
 "How can I support you?"

## What shows up

Feelings, People, Events



## What you practice

Skills, resources, response

## WYFLION

Whether You Feel Like It Or Not

You can do things that are important to you when you don't feel like it  
 You can refrain from doing things even when you really feel like doing them  
 You have the internal resources you need to deal with whatever shows up -- whether you feel like it or not

"The opposite of anxiety is faith"

"I know what's going to happen, and I don't believe I have what I need to deal with it."

"I don't know what's going to happen, and I believe I have what I need to deal with it."

Confidence can be:

Conditional  
 "It will work out the way I want"

Unconditional  
 "I can work with what happens"

## Failure



Learning Practice  
 Failure  
 Discomfort

Definition of failure: not getting the result we wanted  
 Conditional confidence results from getting the result we want  
 Unconditional confidence comes from working with what we get



"I'm tired — very tired — but it was worth it!"  
 "It was a great feeling to cross the finish line here. This is the best race of the year."

## Survival & Growth



Anything can be viewed as a problem or an opportunity

Escape from discomfort or pursuit of pleasure are not formulas for fulfillment

# PRINCIPLES

For the last 30 years, I have been studying and teaching the science, wisdom, principles, and practices that support human well-being and thriving.

I work fulltime as a well-being coach for individuals and a consultant for teams and organizations. My mission is to help people live peacefully, powerfully, and purposefully. I believe that living this way is good for individuals, communities, and, indeed, the planet.

Below are the principles that underlie everything in this guide. If you can get on board with these, then you are likely to find the rest worth reading.

*Fulfillment is a much more durable and resilient form of happiness than pleasure.* Happiness includes positive feelings and purposeful activities. We live in a society that puts a tremendous value on pleasure and comfort. There are significant drawbacks to an overemphasis on feeling good.

*The key to fulfillment is aligning your daily habits with what matters and what works.* Organizing your daily behavior around purpose, meaning, and effectiveness leads to a level of fulfillment and satisfaction that the pursuit of pleasure and comfort can never rival.

*Sometimes you feel like doing what is important to you and sometimes you do not.* This is not because you are lazy or lack willpower - this is because you are human. The fact that some of your habits, urges, and impulses do not align with your deeper life goals is just part of your evolutionary legacy.

*No matter how you live your life, comfort and discomfort are going to be part of it.* If you pursue a fulfilling and purposeful life, then discomfort and comfort are going to show up. If you pursue a pleasant and comfortable life, then discomfort and comfort are going to show up. There is no third option - there is no life you can live that will not include discomfort.

*If you transform your relationship with discomfort, you will transform your life.* A critical choice is the kind of relationship you are going to have with discomfort. Will you organize your life around avoiding it? Will you accept it as part of life, and work with it as peacefully and powerfully as you can?

*Transforming your life takes practice.* It would be great if you could simply shift your life through a conceptual understanding or by having an emotional breakthrough. These things can certainly be helpful. However, talking or thinking about your habits or your relationship with discomfort is not the same as practicing working with them in real life.

*Knowledge is not practice.* One clever strategy that your brain uses to avoid adopting new practices is to substitute knowledge for practice. For example, knowing that exercise is good for you does not give you the benefits of exercise. However, knowing that exercise is good for you can give you an excuse not to exercise. Knowledge is not practice - practice is practice.

## Be Careful What You Practice

You have lots of habits. Some work and some don't. Some were developed by design, and some were developed by default. We have this incredible ability to consciously practice things until they become automatic. If we do not do this carefully and thoughtfully, we end up with habits that simply do not work.

Your brain is constantly rewiring itself to become more skilled at what you do repeatedly. Modern science tells us that your brain is continually building or dismantling connections based on what you do. And your brain is constantly trying to move repeated behavior under unconscious control for efficiency.

You have the incredible human ability to consciously rewire your brain by engaging in behavior over time. In other words, you get better at what you practice. Skill is a matter of connectivity in your brain. The stronger and faster connections are, the more comfortable and automatic a behavior becomes. This is true for physical, emotional, social, and mental skills. Deliberate, conscious practice is the quickest path to building new connections in your brain.

Thinking is great, but thinking alone is unlikely to create the kind of change you seek. Practicing - doing - is what is most likely to bring up the kind of discomfort that is most helpful to work through. Your brain can be shaped by doing things that are important and effective or by doing things that are familiar and comfortable. It's your choice.

You get what you practice. When you are angry, you experience anger. When you are loving, you experience love. If you would like more love in your life, then the most direct route is to practice being loving. If you want acceptance, gratitude, kindness, or joy in your life, then the most direct strategy is to practice being accepting, kind, and joyful.

You are always practicing something. Your brain does not care whether you want to get better at something, it only cares that you do it. When you sleep at night, your brain organizes itself to get better at what you did during the day. This is how a habit is formed. When you argue, you get better at arguing. When you listen, you get better at listening. When you complain, you get better at complaining. When you treat yourself or others harshly, you get better at that. When you treat yourself or others kindly, you get better at that. And so on.

New practices can be uncomfortable. Learning a new skill requires practice, and practice requires effort. Your brain likes to save energy, and it connects what you have done in the past with your current survival; therefore it can be resistant to trying new things. Experiencing resistance to starting new practices or letting go of old practices is completely normal.

"I just want  
my child to  
be happy"

# HAPPINESS

"I just want my child to be happy." I hear this a lot from my clients. Heck, I feel this a lot myself. Certainly we get strong messages from society that this is what we should be aiming for. The pursuit of happiness is even written into the founding documents of our nation. It might be helpful to ask what we mean by happiness. It turns out that happiness is a bit more complicated than we might think.

Part of happiness comes from feeling good. Pleasurable experiences make a positive difference and savoring these moments is an important part of a good life. Taking the time to enjoy what is going well is a powerful practice for well-being.

The other incredibly important part of the happiness formula is fulfillment. A large body of research shows that meaning, purpose, contribution, learning, and healthy relationships are absolutely critical to lasting happiness.

Pleasure and fulfillment originate from two different functional pathways in the brain. Pleasure pathways are more reactive - they depend largely on circumstances to trigger them. This means that pleasure tends to be short-lived and volatile. Activity in the brain's fulfillment pathways is less reactive and longer lasting. It is based more on the durable sense of purpose and meaning. Pay attention to your own experience and you will see how this plays out in daily life - pleasurable moments can be fleeting and unpredictable, while fulfillment is less dependent on the ever-changing circumstances of life.

The reason that it is important to understand the two components of happiness is because being overly focused on pleasure and comfort can actually lead you away from a more fulfilling life. Ironically, one of the things that can get in the way of the life you really want is the compulsive pursuit of feeling better.

There is nothing wrong with engaging in activities that are merely pleasurable or comfortable. The challenge comes when these activities displace purposeful and meaningful pursuits. Falling into the trap of using pleasurable or comfortable behaviors as an escape from challenging emotions means that we lose valuable information that is contained in our discomfort.

I have nothing against comfort - who would? It's just that the single-minded pursuit of comfort and pleasure can be an obstacle to fulfillment. This applies to the attachment to short-term comfort that keeps you from doing meaningful stuff. It also applies to the belief in delayed comfort that will come if you just work hard enough now. The challenge with this latter approach is that comfort may show up later if you work hard now, but so will discomfort.

When we become overly focused on comfort, it can keep us from personal growth and healthy self-expression, the development of deep and meaningful relationships with others, and the adoption of effective habits or the release of ineffective ones.

Our obsession with comfort is not good for our bodies either. Comfort seeking behavior has created a whole host of life-shortening illnesses. The children being born now are the first generation of young people who will not live as long as their parents. This is almost completely due to behavior-related diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and several forms of cancer.

Our pursuit of comfort is not sustainable for the planet. Consuming at the level necessary to meet our desires is using resources at a rate that is depleting the quality of our air, water, and soil, changing the nature of our climate, and taking a toll on just about every other form of life.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, satisfying our desires for comfort in the short term does not extinguish them - it fuels them. The more you act on the urges for comfort created by your

nervous system, the more you reinforce them. This is just how it works.

The pursuit of pleasure creates dependence on your circumstances to trigger the feelings you want to experience. It leads you to avoid circumstances that trigger the feelings you don't want. This can make life feel very much like a rollercoaster as you constantly look to your situation to determine the quality of your life. This is known as conditional well-being.

While circumstances matter to a point, you live in a very complex universe where you have very little control over what shows up. The weather, other people's behavior, traffic, the markets...these all fall outside your direct influence. Fortunately, there are factors under your control that have a significant impact on your well-being.

While you cannot choose what shows up in life, you have an incredible capacity to choose what you practice -where you focus your attention and energy. Focusing on what you practice builds the skill of unconditional well-being. Taking responsibility for the unconditional components of your well-being is an incredible source of personal power and freedom.

Fulfillment, it turns out, is a daily practice, not a place you arrive when circumstances are just right. Putting your attention and energy into the things you value most - goals, commitments, relationships - this is the practice of fulfillment. Sometimes this practice is comfortable and pleasurable and sometimes it is not. With practice, we can build the habits of fulfillment and experience increasing freedom from the ping-pong approach of pursuing pleasure and avoiding discomfort. This leads to a happiness more sublime than pleasure.

# Discomfort is normal

Working with  
discomfort is a skill

Awareness and  
acceptance of  
discomfort is a  
powerful practice

Effort does not  
require struggle



# DISCOMFORT

From a young age we learn that discomfort is something to be avoided. We have people in our lives who are trying to either rescue us from discomfort or make us feel that there is something wrong with us if we are feeling discomfort. In reality, discomfort is just part of a normal human life.

When we can accept discomfort as part of life, then we can stop struggling against it. Sometimes life is going to be the way we want it to be and sometimes it is not. That's all.

Living requires effort. There is a certain amount of energy that is necessary to live a life. Some things are physically difficult - running, lifting heavy things, jumping, climbing stairs - they demand a lot of energy. We also burn calories planning, choosing, and executing mental tasks of all kinds throughout the day. Effort is the energy required to do stuff.

Struggle is extra. The energy we put into resisting or clinging to the ways things are, trying to manage what is outside our control, or habitually engaging in ineffective behaviors - this is struggle. Putting energy into struggle can lead to exhaustion, frustration, overwhelm, isolation, and even illness.

We struggle because we are conditioned to do so. The survival system in your brain sees the world through the lens of problems, obstacles, and threats. This system is necessary to live a life, but it can create struggle where none is necessary. It can also be convincing in its insistence that you have no choice but to struggle.

"This is hard." When you imagine having a difficult conversation with a friend or relative, you may feel some discomfort. The translation of this discomfort is often "this is hard." So we put off the conversation. In fact, having the conversation may only burn a few calories, but the resenting, dreading, and avoiding the conversation can consume quite a bit of energy.

Changing behavior often fits in the category of "hard." When you think about doing something differently or starting a new practice, you may run into the thought "this is hard." It is worth asking, "is this really difficult, or is it just associated with some discomfort?" When you are aware and accepting of your conditioning, you can see the difference between effort and struggle. You can put your energy into working with life rather than against it.

# Language

*"Tell me more"*

*"Let me see if I get this"*

*"That's normal"*

*"I trust that you can deal with whatever happens"*

*"How can I support you?"*

## LANGUAGE OF CONNECTION

As a parent, a partner, or a coworker, we can connect with others without trying to fix them, blame them, or rescue them. We can be present to the way that they are experiencing the world. We can be empathetic without taking on their struggles.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will see that our efforts to rescue, fix, or blame come from our desire to escape our own discomfort when we are in the presence of someone else who is uncomfortable.

So, the first step is to accept that our own discomfort is just part of life. Then we can be present for someone else when they are expressing their struggles.

The goal here is to understand the other person whether we agree or not. We are trying to support the other person in working gracefully with their situation.

We can:

- Listen
- Reflect that we have heard
- Normalize that they are having human emotions
- Express our faith in their ability to deal with challenge
- Offer support
- 

If we jump straight to a solution, we:

- May be trying to solve a problem we do not understand.
- Risk robbing this person of a chance to build a skill
- Miss a chance to strengthen our connection through understanding
- Send a message that they are not up to the challenge

# What shows up Feelings, People, Events



# What you practice Skills, resources, response

## WHAT SHOWS UP & WHAT WE PRACTICE

Conditional wellbeing is shaped by what shows up. Events, people, weather - stuff shows up around us because we live in a complex universe. Sensations, emotions, and thoughts - stuff shows up within us because we are human beings with complex nervous systems. We like some of the stuff that shows up, and we do not like other stuff that shows up. We don't really get to choose what shows up in life. This is just how life is.

Unconditional wellbeing is shaped by what we practice. In addition to what shows up, there is where we choose to put our attention and energy. What we practice includes the training we do to build skills or cultivate internal resources. It also includes how we respond to what shows up in the moment. Choosing what we practice is at the heart of unconditional wellbeing.

Circumstances are real. I am definitely not suggesting that having a good attitude or thinking positively will make oppression, poverty, injustice, illness, injury, loss, and discomfort go away. I am suggesting that focusing on what we practice allows us to address these challenges consciously and purposefully, rather than letting them determine the quality of our lives.

The outside-in approach is popular. Many of us work very hard to get circumstances the way we want them, hoping that this will lead to the internal experience we seek. We look for the person who will trigger an internal feeling of love, the beautiful setting that will trigger pleasant feelings of relaxation or awe, or the achievement that will trigger feelings of joy and satisfaction.

A significant part of our wellbeing is unconditional. There is nothing wrong with the outside-in approach, but it is limited by the fact that what shows up is constantly changing. When we focus on what we practice, we can optimize our wellbeing within the inevitable constraints of life. The more we practice working peacefully and

powerfully with whatever shows up in life, the less the quality of our lives depends on circumstances that are outside our control.

Your relationship to your thoughts and sensations is key. Each of us has autopilot responses to what shows up in life. Some of these responses are aligned with our goals and values, and some are not. We can build awareness and acceptance of our conditioned responses to life. We can gain clarity about the nature of our thoughts and sensations. Awareness, acceptance, and clarity allow the opportunity for a conscious response to what shows up.

# WYFLION

Whether You Feel Like It Or Not

You can do things that are important to you when you don't feel like it

You can refrain from doing things even when you really feel like doing them

You have the internal resources you need to deal with whatever shows up -- whether you feel like it or not

# W Y F L I O N

You are capable of doing things whether you feel like it or not. This simple truth may seem obvious to you. It may not seem like that big a deal. However, it is an absolute rarity in the animal kingdom. It is an evolutionary wonder - right up there with color vision and written language. For every other species, there is a direct link between stimulus in the environment, sensations in the body, and behavior. There is no conscious choice between feelings and action.

As a human being, you have the ability to evaluate an urge or impulse against purpose, values, and commitments. You can choose to do something that you don't feel like doing. You can choose to do something that benefits a purpose that is more fulfilling than your immediate comfort or pleasure.

We can so easily take this for granted, but it may be the single greatest ability we possess. It is at the very center of a fulfilling life. Scientists call this ability self-regulation, but I like WYFLION much better.

There are three forms of self-regulation, each of which can be strengthened through practice. They are intentionally presented in the following order because each one is a foundation for the next.

**Attentional Self-Regulation:** The ability to consciously choose where your attention is focused, to notice when your attention has wandered, and to return it to where it will be most useful.

**Emotional Self-Regulation:** The ability to be consciously aware of what you are feeling, to accept what you are feeling without avoiding it or indulging it, and to cultivate positive emotions such as gratitude, compassion, and awe.

**Behavioral Self-Regulation:** The ability to align your actions with your values by putting your energy into tasks that serve your goals, commitments, and relationships.

WYFLION is the key to behavior change and habit design. The reason most of us don't change our behaviors is because they are comfortable - even the ones that don't work. Creating the kinds of habits that really work - the kind of habits that support the life we really want - requires us to ease our grip on comfort.

Harnessing the simple truth of WYFLION and leveraging it daily can transform your life. It can allow you to break free from limiting beliefs and useless habits. It can allow you to see what you are really capable of. WYFLION is the lever that aligns your daily life with the goals, commitments, and relationships you value the most. It is the most direct way to discover the confidence to work peacefully and purposefully with whatever shows up in your life.

WYFLION allows you to:

- Feel the fear of rejection & still express yourself honestly,
- Feel the desire to avoid a task & get started anyway,
- Feel anxiety about the future & move forward gracefully,
- Feel an urge to engage in an old habit & let it go,
- Feel the craving to do something unhealthy & take a pass,
- Feel the impulse to interrupt or fix & listen for understanding,
- Feel anger or frustration & be kind,
- Feel uncertainty & ask for what you need,
- Feel selfish & consider what others need,
- Feel the need to be right & be supportive of those you love

WYFLION is not a cure for cancer, or a way to get the universe to be the way you think it is supposed to be. WYFLION will not necessarily change other people's behavior or make you more popular. What it will do is create space for conscious choice in the presence of habitual urges and impulses. This space allows you to focus your attention and energy where they will have the greatest positive effect.

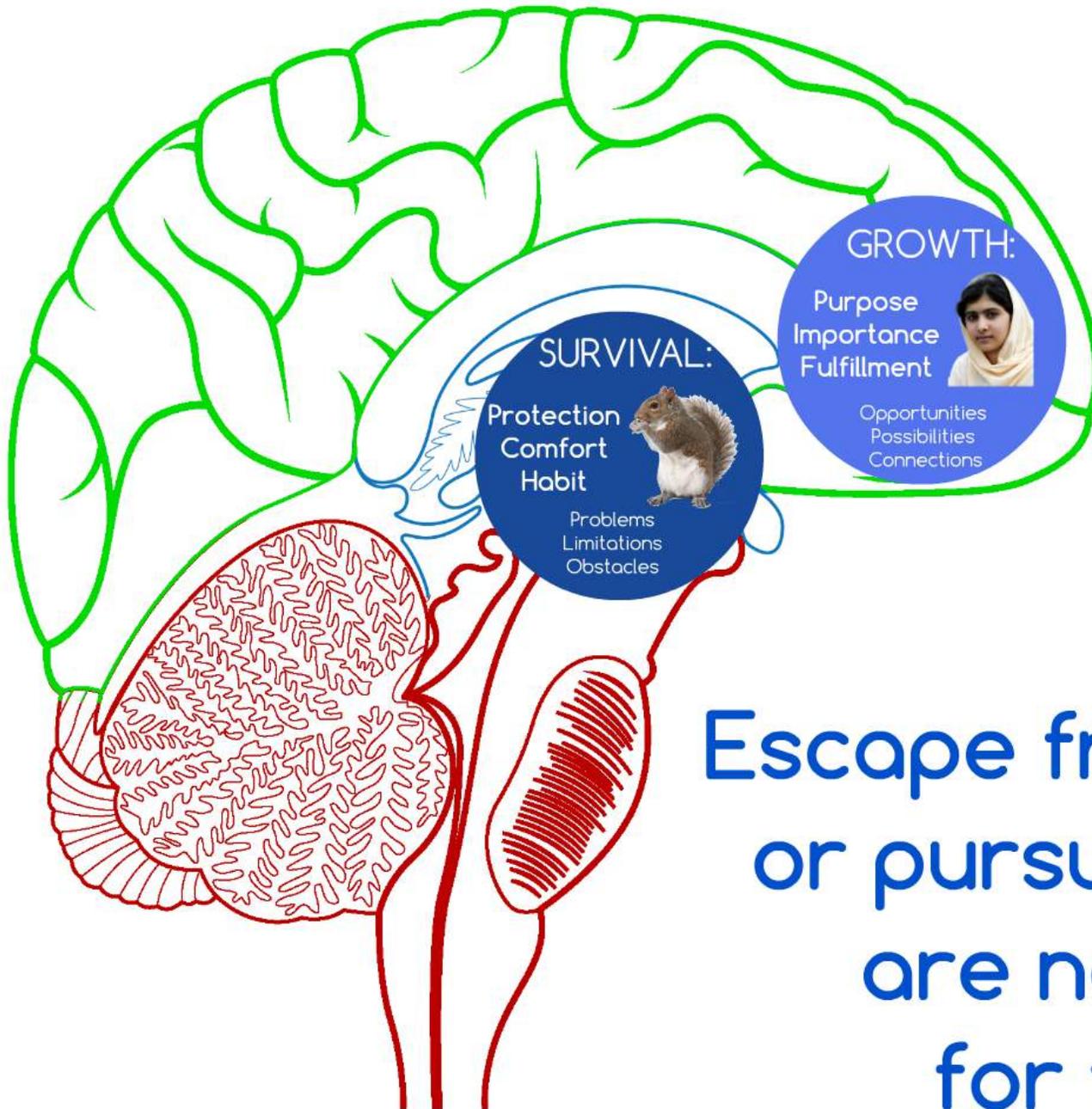
WYFLION is not the same as willpower. This practice is not about gutting it out, forcing yourself through, suppressing urges, or resisting temptation. The foundation of WYFLION is awareness and acceptance. The point is to develop a more peaceful relationship with the sensations and thoughts that drive your behavior. This relationship allows you to choose a powerful and purposeful response.

WYFLION is not about self-improvement. It is not about being perfect. It is about cultivating awareness, acceptance, honesty, courage, and compassion. This is an approach to life that is open to what shows up and focused on what matters.

If you choose to develop your capacity for WYFLION, you will feel discomfort. Guaranteed. You will get frustrated. You will forget to practice. You will fail. You will want to give up. This is all part of it.

You don't have to do this. You don't need to do this. This is not a "should." This is a choice.

# Survival & Growth



Anything can be viewed as a problem or an opportunity

Escape from discomfort or pursuit of pleasure are not formulas for fulfillment

## SURVIVAL & GROWTH BRAIN

You have (at least) two brains. It can be useful to think of yourself as having two major systems in your brain. One of these systems is responsible for keeping you alive. The other system is responsible for prioritizing goals and values. We can refer to these respectively as the survival and the growth systems.

Nothing in the human nervous system is simple. The human brain may be the single most complex item in the universe. However, thinking about your brain from the perspective of survival and growth gives a framework for understanding why you do things that conflict with your values and how you can take purposeful action even when you don't feel like it.

The survival system is necessary for learning and for creating automatic behavior. The survival system is the seat of habit, and it allows you to do an amazing number of things on autopilot. At this very moment, your survival system is scanning your environment for potential threats - it is the system that tenses your body when you hear a loud noise. This system can also lead you to yell at someone you love, or stare into the refrigerator late at night despite the fact that you are not hungry.

Your survival system stores associations. Seeking patterns allows your brain to learn from past experience. It stores connections between patterns in your environment and automatic behavior. These connections allow your brain to conserve energy by engaging in preprogrammed responses. The challenge is that, in its eagerness not to miss a potential threat, this system can make false associations between some behaviors and your survival. You can be left with habits that aren't useful or, in some cases, even destructive.

The growth system is necessary for prioritizing commitments and organizing time. This system is capable of incorporating information beyond what feels familiar and comfortable. This means that you

have the incredible ability to do something even when you do not feel like it in the moment. You also have the ability to refrain from a behavior even when you feel like doing it.

You need both systems. Being able to store repetitive behaviors and control them unconsciously is really helpful - so is being able to consciously override urges that lead to unproductive behavior. One of the most incredible things about being human is that you can consciously use your growth system to install or uninstall automatic behaviors within the survival system through consistent, deliberate practice.



"I'm tired — very tired — but it was worth it!"

"It was a great feeling to cross the finish line here. This is the best race of the year."

# Failure



Learning  
Practice  
Failure  
Discomfort



Definition of failure: not getting the result we wanted

Conditional confidence results from getting the result we want

Unconditional confidence comes from working with what we get

# "The opposite of

# anxiety is faith"

"I know what's going to happen, and I don't believe I have what I need to deal with it."

"I don't know what's going to happen, and I believe I have what I need to deal with it."

# Confidence can be:

## Conditional

"It will work out the way I want"

## Unconditional

"I can work with what happens"

# ANXIETY

Anxiety is a real physiological experience. It involves systems of the body designed to keep you safe in the presence of a real physical threat. Anxiety can be activated with a thought or belief. This means that your body can get completely geared up in the absence of an actual threat.

The opposite of anxiety is faith. One of the primary beliefs that can hold anxiety in place is that you know what the future is going to bring and that you are not going to be able to deal with it. Faith, on the other hand, is the belief that you don't know what is going to happen in the future and that you have what you need to deal with whatever shows up. You have a tremendous amount of evidence from your life that this is true - unexpected and unwanted things have happened many times, and you have always dealt with them.

Acceptance is a powerful way to work with anxiety. Because anxiety is so uncomfortable, it is understandable that you want to get rid of it when it shows up. Ironically, this can actually intensify the experience. When you treat anxiety as a threat, you engage the same part of the nervous system that created it in the first place. As bizarre as it may sound, acceptance of anxiety often allows you to work with it more effectively.

Acceptance is not the same as resignation. Resignation is based on the notion that nothing can be done. Acceptance is simply the acknowledgment that what is happening is happening. You can bring awareness and acceptance to the actual physical experience - tightness of the chest, throat, or stomach, increased heart rate and breathing, racing thoughts, etc...

Confidence is a relationship to uncertainty. One of the ways that people comfort each other is to say things like "everything is going to work out just fine." This is a well-intentioned thing to do, but in reality, no one knows what is going to happen in the future.

Convincing yourself that things will work out the way you want them to can lead to a fragile confidence that is dependent on circumstances that are largely outside your control.

Unconditional confidence comes from the acceptance of uncertainty about future events combined with the experiential knowledge that you can work with whatever shows up. Of course, there may be discomfort that comes with challenge, but the fact that you are reading this is evidence that you have always survived discomfort.

# Mindfulness

The skillful use of attention

Conscious awareness & acceptance of what is present

Mindfulness is not: Relaxation A quick fix A cure-all



We can be mindful of restlessness, stress, anxiety, or any other internal experience



Mindfulness can create space to accept feelings & thoughts instead of clinging or avoiding

Bowlin, S. L., & Baer, R. A. (2012). Relationships between mindfulness, self-control, and psychological functioning. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 411-415.

# MINDFULNESS

Developing a conscious relationship to thoughts and sensations is incredibly helpful. You can build awareness and acceptance for the impulses and urges that show up inside you. You can gain clarity about the nature of your automatic responses to life. Awareness, acceptance, and clarity allow the opportunity for a conscious response to whatever shows up.

The way we build awareness, acceptance, and clarity is through the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is nothing more than the skillful use of attention. Mindfulness includes noticing where your attention is, accepting what you find, and returning it where you choose when it wanders. Anytime you are consciously bringing your attention, with acceptance, to what is going on within you or around you, you are being mindful.

Attention wanders. Getting distracted is normal. With practice, you can notice sooner and sooner when your attention has wandered, and you can make the choice to bring it back to what is happening in the present. Mindfulness practice is a great metaphor for life - we focus, we get distracted, we notice that we are distracted, and we bring our focus back. That's all.

Mindfulness is not the same as relaxation. You might find that you relax when you practice, and you might notice that you feel tense, bored, or restless. All of this is normal. The point is to bring attention and acceptance to the way things are at the moment. You can be mindful of restlessness, stress, anxiety, or any other internal experience. You can be mindful of a sound, an image, the temperature of the air, or any other external experience.

Left idle, it is common for your attention to wander. Often it lands on a perceived threat or problem. This can be no problem if you are aware of this and make the choice to engage in intentional problem-solving or planning. However, you can easily get caught in a pattern

of ruminating or catastrophizing about the past or future without realizing that this is what you are doing. You can also get caught in a cycle of judging or blaming yourself or others when things are not as you want them to be. Excellent antidotes or buffers to these tendencies are mindfulness and compassion practices.

Mindfulness practice begins with a commitment. You choose something to pay attention to. It is common practice to start with the sensations of the breath, but you can use the sensations of walking, eating, or just about anything else. You can also use an object or a sound. The reason the breath can be so useful is that you always have it with you.

Set a timer for at least five minutes. Find the sensations of breathing in your body - you might notice it in the movement of your belly, the movement of your chest, or in the movement of air in your nostrils or in the back of your throat. Just notice and accept whatever happens. When you notice that your attention is someplace other than the breath, just bring it back kindly and gently.

There is no instruction to suppress or avoid thinking. If you notice that your attention has wandered to a thought or another sensation, accept this and return your attention to the breath. There is no instruction to keep your mind from wandering. When you notice that it has wandered, just bring it back kindly and gently.

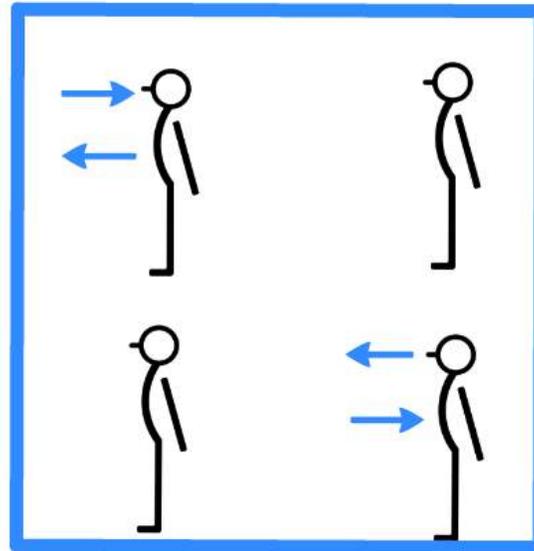
Sometimes it can be useful to count your breaths - "one" on the in-breath, "two" on the out-breath, and so on, up to a count of ten. When you reach ten, or if you lose count (completely normal), then simply begin again at "one."

Of course, this is just practice - the ultimate goal is to bring attention throughout each day to what is happening in the present with as much acceptance as you can muster.

# Breathing

The breath is a powerful self-regulation tool

In breath 4 count



Pause 4 count

Pause 4 count

Out breath 4 count

Allow your belly to fall away from your body on the in breath

Bring your belly back toward your spine on the out breath

## BREATHING

One of the most effective ways you can self-regulate is with your breathing. When we perceive a threat, we tend to breathe shallower and more rapidly. This is because fleeing or fighting are acute, anaerobic activities that use a lot of energy in a very short period of time.

Like so many biological processes, there is a bidirectional pathway between physiology and perception. In this case, the perception of threat can trigger shallow rapid breathing AND shallow, rapid breathing can trigger or reinforce the perception of threat. When we do try to breathe deeply, most of us do so by expanding our chest. This is quite inefficient as your chest is a relatively rigid container.

By paying attention and breathing more slowly into a relaxed belly, you can lower levels of stress hormones in your blood stream and reduce activity in the more reactive and self-defensive parts of your nervous system. This practice builds the skill of being alert and responsive without being vigilant and reactive. This practice, known as box breathing, is an effective way to oxygenate your blood and to send signals of safety to your brain. It is also a good mindfulness practice as it is difficult to pay attention to anything else while you are doing this.

If you wait until you are stressed or anxious, it is tough to get in enough practice, and it can feel like you are using the breathing to avoid or suppress difficult feelings. Therefore, it is helpful to practice breathing throughout the day, whether you are stressed or not.

This practice is called box breathing because it takes the shape of four steps that each takes a count of four. Begin with an in-breath for a slow count of four. As you breathe in, allow your belly to

relax and fall away from your body as it makes space for a full, deep breath.\*

Wait gently for a slow count of four. The point of this is not to add tension, but to pause in a relaxed state. Breathe out for a slow count of four and bring your belly button back toward your spine. Wait gently for a slow count of four. Begin another round by releasing your belly and breathing in for a count of four.

*\*Many of us are used to lifting our chest when we breathe in, so it may feel a bit awkward to allow our belly to move out when we breathe in. With practice, this will come more and more naturally.*

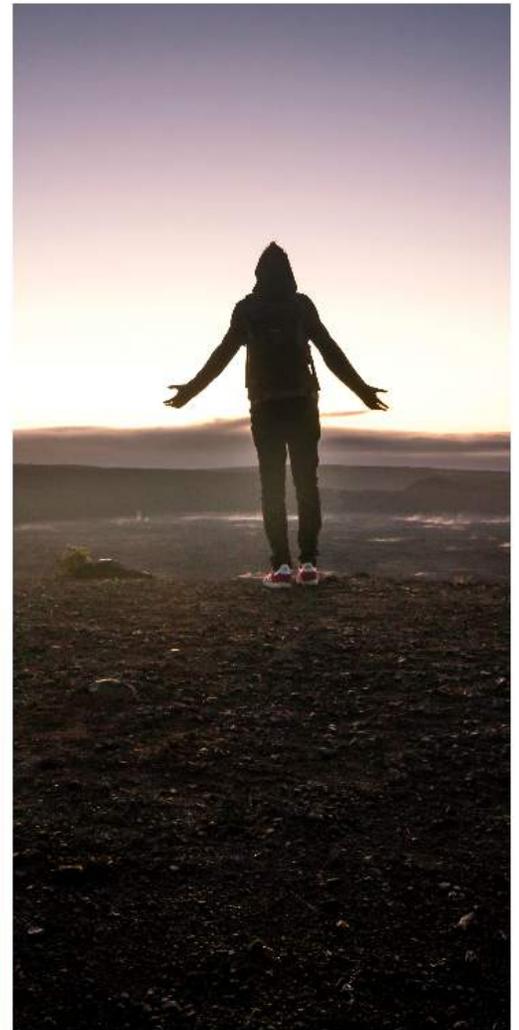
# Posture

Open your chest & shoulders  
Feel your feet on the ground  
Breathe deeply & smile

Connect with gratitude

Wish others well

Marvel that you exist



## POSTURE

When we perceive a threat, we tend to close our body posture. This can happen in acute ways - raising our arms and turning away or curling up in a ball. It also happens in smaller ways - crossing our arms, looking down, rolling our shoulders forward, standing in the corner of a room, or crossing our legs. Like breathing, there is a bidirectional pathway between your posture and your perception - your posture can be a reflection of how you are feeling and it can be a cause of what you are feeling. When you contract and hold internal tension or resistance, you send messages to your brain that there is a reason to be wary. Many of us do this without knowing we are doing it. The antidote is to stand or sit upright with your chest lifted and your shoulders open and allowed to drape.

You can do this sitting up or standing. Lengthen your spine, lift and open your chest, roll your shoulders back and let them drop. This is a confident and vulnerable stance. Next, close your eyes - this increases the feeling of vulnerability. Smile gently - this increases the sense of safety. Feel your feet on the ground and breathe deeply.

This open and alert posture sends signals to the brain that you are safe and capable. This is something to practice several times a day. While you are in this posture, you can do any or all of the following:

Take in your surroundings. Listen to the sounds around you. Look at the scene around you. Feel the air or the sun on your face..

Feel gratitude. Bring to mind a person, relationship, experience, or opportunity for which you are deeply grateful and appreciative. Focus your attention on this and notice the sensations in your body.

Marvel that you exist. Bring your attention to the inconceivable miracle of existence.

Wish others well. Bring your attention to the notion that all human beings struggle from time to time. You can send sincere wishes that all beings shall find some peace in the midst of their struggles.

# Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is connected with performance, resilience, empathy & happiness



Rest your hand gently on the part of the body where you feel love or gratitude

Imagine feeling kindness for yourself

Just be with any discomfort until you can actually feel some kindness for yourself

or... smile gently at the person in the mirror until you feel just a bit of kindness

or... make a mental list of the people you love and sneak your name in at the end

## SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion is not the same as self-indulgence. Being kind to yourself does not mean that you do whatever you feel like and then give yourself a pass on the consequences. You are capable of kindly holding yourself accountable for keeping your commitments and taking full responsibility when you don't.

Without self-compassion, it is easy to get focused on what is wrong with *us as a person*. This is a red herring that leads to a cycle of self-bashing that takes attention and energy away from healthy growth. With honest, self-compassionate evaluation, we can focus on *our strategies* and pivot if our current approach isn't working.

Judgment is natural and normal - fueling it is not part of this practice. Without self-acceptance and self-compassion, this practice can easily become a vehicle for harsh self-judgment. And without acceptance and compassion for others, mindful self-regulation can be used to feed self-involvement and egotism.

Much of the anxiety and stress we face comes from how hard we are on ourselves. It is easy to get caught in the illusion that there is a razor thin path of success or a definition of "doing it right." On either side of this knife's edge we imagine a drop into a life of rejection, isolation, and flavorless mediocrity.

There are voices in our heads. Many of us travel through the world with voices in our heads that are constantly reminding us of how we are falling short. These voices are so familiar that we fail to see it as anything other than the truth.

Treating our critical voices like the truth has a cost. We end up defending ourselves from ourselves and endlessly trying to prove ourselves to ourselves. Sometimes the voice can feel so relentless that we just give up trying altogether. Compassion is the practice of letting down our guard and vulnerably acknowledging that we are human - that we are no more or less miraculous than anyone else.

The enduring wisdom of "Love thy neighbor as thyself" suggests that each of us is as deserving of our love and kindness as anyone else.

Self-compassion supports courage. There is deep psychological safety that comes from accessing self-compassion. From this place of safety, we can listen to viewpoints that differ from our own, we can reach out with kindness to people even when we don't know how they will respond. We can take risks in the name of our values, even when our choices may not be popular. We can free ourselves from the dependence on the validation of others, and we can release the need to criticize others in order to elevate ourselves.

*Four methods for practicing self-compassion.*

**Make a mental list of the people in your life that you love.** Go through them one at a time focusing on the feelings of love as you bring each person to mind. Then slip your name in at the end and see if you can find a bit of that feeling for yourself.

**Bring to mind the person you care most about in the world.** Put your hand on the area of the body where you feel sensations of warmth or kindness for others. As you do this, imagine sending those feelings of kindness to your self.

**Look in a mirror.** Soften your gaze a bit. Experiment with a gentle smile for the person looking back at you. You can do this when you brush your teeth or wash your face. Look at your reflection until some of the awkwardness passes and you feel some kindness for the person looking back at you.

**Remind yourself that you have your own back.** It is great practice to start the day -- no matter how the day goes, you will be kind to you. If you are anticipating an upcoming challenge, take a moment to assure yourself that you will not be unkind to yourself even if it does not go as you hope.

# COMPASSION

Compassion is the simple acknowledgement of human struggle. People work hard to look like they have it all together all the time, but if you look closely, you will see the weight of life on people's faces. We can practice finding compassion for people who we don't know, don't like, or don't agree with. Research suggests that positive human relationships may be the single greatest predictor of health, happiness, and longevity. The practice of compassion can help us feel connected with others in small ways throughout the day.

Compassion for others allows us to be curious about alternative ways of seeing the world. Rather than rigidly defending our perspective as if we were defending our physical selves, we can accept that there are many ways to see the world.

No matter how aware, accepting, principled, kind, and brilliant you are, some people are going to disagree with you and dislike you. No matter what you do, some people are going to resist and resent your efforts. And you will do the same to others. Disagreement is a natural outcome of human biology. You can accept this and work with it, or you can resist it and be frustrated and exhausted. Compassion is a great tool for working with disagreement.

*There are several ways to practice compassion:*

**Focus on kindness.** Look for the small ways that the people around you are helping and supporting each other. This is especially powerful if you are feeling annoyed or stressed. Look for small ways to help people throughout the day - the smaller and more frequent, the better.

**Look at people.** When you walk into a supermarket, your office building, or a coffee shop, just stop and really look at the people around you. If you let yourself, you can feel the whole range of human emotion that is around you - joy, fear, anger, curiosity, sadness, stress, enthusiasm, and anxiety. It is a powerful practice to stop this way and feel the humanity around you.

**Listen mindfully.** When another person is telling you about a situation, bring all of your attention to what they are telling you. Listen as intensely as if you were going to be tested on what you heard. When your attention wanders (which it will), you can notice this and bring it back. Listening

mindfully, you may feel the physical urge to interrupt, to fix the other person, or to make the conversation about you. This is all normal. When you feel this, notice it and bring your attention back to what the other person is telling you.

**Use "Tell me more."** A powerful practice for connecting with another person and refraining from taking over the conversation is simply to use the phrase "Tell me more." This is especially powerful if the person is upset or if you disagree with them. The added benefit is that it can help you listen to another person even when you have a very different perspective. This simple phrase can transform a relationship with a child, a partner, or a coworker.

**Use the rule of thirds.** It can be helpful to assume that no matter what you do, a third of people may like you, a third may not, and a third just don't care. Rather than focusing on how others feel about you, you can focus on practicing what is most important. You are free to be as kind, supportive, and helpful as you can be and everyone else is free to feel about you however they feel about you.

**Default to support.** You can practice prioritizing connection over the need to be right. When you feel the need to argue or get your way, you can practice being supportive of others. It is helpful to notice the physical urge to correct or convince someone of your point of view - this is conditioning. In a moment when you feel the urge to defend yourself, you can practice letting the urge pass and simply listening to the other person.

**Use "I get it, and"** This phrase allows us to place two or more viewpoints side by side. The word "but" automatically creates conflict between two perspectives. Using the phrase "I get it, and..." can be a great practice for recognizing someone else's viewpoint without letting go of your own. It allows you to be both accepting and assertive rather than passive or aggressive.

## BONUS: THE COLD SHOWER

A cold shower is a powerful metaphor for life. You can take a cold shower tightly contracted and making funny noises, or you can take a cold shower in an open and relaxed state. Either way, it is a cold shower. Resistance does not warm the water.

Many daily events are like a cold shower. When you have a flat tire, no amount of contraction and resistance fixes it. When you do not like what is happening in life, you can contract, resist, yell, blame, and complain. Or you can put your hands at your side and relax. The choice is yours.

One of the main sources of human struggle is resistance to our own feelings. When you commit to doing something that is likely to trigger discomfort, you can learn a lot about effort, struggle, acceptance, and what you are really capable of. You can learn about your capacity to feel stuff without having to automatically indulge or resist. Exercising this skill gives you the freedom to put your energy into what matters most. A cold shower is a great way to exercise this skill.

To take a cold shower, turn the water temperature in your shower as cold as it will go. As you stand outside the shower, notice any resistance to getting in. Step in with as much acceptance of the experience as you can. Breathe deeply and calmly. Once you get in, notice any contraction and resistance. Notice the choice to remain contracted or to let go, relax, and have the experience just as it is.

The point of this practice is not to "gut it out" or "fight through it." The point is to see that you can have the experience without adding any resistance to it.