

Family Caregivers of BC Webinar SEPTEMBER 14, 2017

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES FOR CAREGIVERS

Patricia Boham Ph.D.

GOAL: To help you shift out of the constant barrage of thoughts in your head and into the present moment. Believe it or not, you have a quiet place inside where you can experience peace and your own innate wisdom even in the midst of a busy stressful life.

As a caregiver, have you ever been on the receiving end of well intentioned advice, like, “take care of yourself first”, and wondered how in the world you were actually going to pull that off or if that was even what you wanted to do? When you find your quiet place inside, free of the constant chatter in your head, you are often able to not only know what you want, but how to get there.

In this webinar, I will share with you ways to make mindfulness a part of your busy life. The techniques are user friendly and do not require time commitment. It is possible to take care of YOU, it is possible to find YOU, in the midst of dedicating much of your time and energy to caring for someone else’s life.

I have been meditating for over 30 years and about 3 months into being a full time caregiver for my husband, I realized that I had stopped meditating. I no longer exercised, ate right, or had time for the activities that had been a part of my life for many years. I was getting lost in the endless round of activity that surrounds caring for another human being. I had lost myself and had even lost more connection with my husband than would be necessary due to his condition. With that realization, I was motivated to find a better way. The Buddhists say that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. It never ceases to amaze me that it is often a difficult situation that pushes me to deeper understanding of such wisdom and to take what I may have thought I knew to a deeper level where I could use it.

Over the past two years of caregiving, I have been putting to work the tools and experiences I learned over years as a psychologist and meditator. I fell back on cognitive and behavioral therapies, understanding of early and ongoing conditioning and my meditation practice, which had evolved into mindfulness over the years. Having learned from mindfulness that the main cause of unhappiness is needing life to be different than it is, I was motivated to get mindfulness back into my life. I wanted to find a way to get back into the driver’s seat, and out of the victim’s seat.

I didn’t have time to spend meditating for long periods, so I found a way to quickly access what I usually experience in meditation. I learned to constantly shift out of my automatic thoughts and focus on the present moment. The more I did that, the

more I realized how much of my stress was coming from the constant barrage of thoughts in my head. When I paid attention to what my thoughts were telling me, I found that, for example, in a difficult situation, like a big unexpected mess, I was hearing judgment, blame, fear, guilt, etc. If a friend was standing at my elbow as I cleaned up the mess, telling me that it was my fault, and I was making the situation worse, or that I probably couldn't get it right and was pushing me into overwhelm, hopefully, I would tell the friend to go home! But I was listening to my own mind telling me the same stuff and not even questioning it. I had to find a way to quiet my mind, as my life was unfolding, not just when I had time to meditate. I am here today to share what is working for me.

Begin with a pause. Imagine your life is a video that keeps going on and on, often focusing on problems and **PRESS THE PAUSE BUTTON.**

BREATHE and pay attention to each breath. Allow each exhale to flow through your body, taking tension with it as it goes.

OBSERVE YOUR BODY. Run your attention through your body, if you find tense places, allow a breath to move through them and see if they will loosen up.

OBSERVE YOUR THOUGHTS. Stand back and just notice what your mind is telling you.

If there are strong feelings demanding your attention, observe them from a distance as if they belonged to someone else. Just name them. Realize they were generated by your thoughts.

Take another breath and observe your thoughts again.

With a bit of practice, your thoughts will slow down when they realize you are not buying into them without question. When your thoughts slow, you will get a hint of your **QUIET PLACE** inside. The more you do this the stronger your connection to your quiet place will become. This is the place where your intuition and deep wisdom resides and it is the place inside of you that gives you respite from whatever is going on around you.

In your quiet place, you are not listening to your mind criticizing you and those around you. A good deal of the drama that wears you out was being generated inside your own head. Without the old assumptions and coping strategies, your mind habitually provides, you may find new, easier and even more compassionate ways to cope and to think of others and yourself.

There are many benefits of quieting your mind and taking charge of your life as it is now. For example, make priorities that include you. For me this means that even if I have a lot to do, when the home support aide comes to get my husband up, I do my yoga and take my dog for a walk. Take an objective look at your routine, are there

things that you are doing that might not be necessary? Spend some quality time with your loved one so that you don't feel like your whole relationship has become one of caregiver and patient. At the end of the day, or when you have time off, go inside to your quiet place and see how you really want to spend that precious time. The other evening, after I ate half a bag of crackers and watched a movie that I didn't really like, I realized how different my evening would have been if I had shifted my focus into mindfulness and made a conscious decision about what would feel good.

Even if **PAUSE, BREATHE, OBSERVE** feels good now that you have tried it, if you are like most people you won't think to use it, especially when you need it most. This is like any exercise in that you need to retrain a "muscle", this time it is your brain. Believe it or not it is trainable!

Try this gimmick, get some file folder dots or small stickers, or stars, or whatever you can easily find and put them on places that you look at frequently, on your watch, doors that you go in and out of frequently, on the telephone, the refrigerator door (if you pause, breathe and observe your mind, you might reach for something that your body would appreciate more than ice cream!) or any surface where you will see the dot or sticker and allow it to be a reminder to **PAUSE, BREATHE, OBSERVE**. No matter how busy you are you have the time to do this. You may not feel you have time to sit and meditate for 20 minutes, but you have to breathe anyway!

Some find that it feels so good that they do want to sit and allow the quiet space to grow into a meditation. If that happens for you, that would be a bonus, it will help you to feel even more rested and in charge of your life.

You may find that you are able to put your self back into your life. You are no longer just running from task to task all day. Surprisingly, you become more efficient when you pause and bring your awareness into the present moment. You stop doing things just because you have always done them that way. You are free to take a fresh look at your loved one, your life and your self.

My thoughts are with all of you. Being a caregiver is often not an easy path. Remember you are not alone, there are a lot of us doing this. I encourage you to participate in **The Caregiver Network's HUDDOL**© on Mindfulness, here is a link <https://www.huddol.com/join/Mindfulness>. Note: you need to set up a HUDDOL account first and then join the Mindfulness Huddol.

Let's share our experiences and discoveries and do let me know if you are **PAUSING, BREATHING AND OBSERVING YOUR THOUGHTS** and if you getting to know your **QUIET SPACE**. I will check in and answer questions and perhaps ask some of my own. I know there are many of you who have experience that could help me as well. We are in this together.