



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

HEALTH PLAN



# Mindful Communication and Connection

Presented by  
Amanda Fox, LPCC

*Certified Health and Well-Being Coach from the OSU Health Plan*



# Top Reasons to Work with a Health Coach

1. Time set aside just for you.
2. A partner who's invested in your progress.
3. Help setting realistic goals and action plans.
4. Encouragement when sticking to the plan is hard.
5. Healthy changes! Feel better. Do better - on your terms.



**Health Coaching is available to benefits-eligible OSU and OSUMC employees.**

Free. Done by phone. Calls are 30 min or less!

To schedule a call, email us your availability.  
[HealthCoach.OSUHealthPlan@osumc.edu](mailto:HealthCoach.OSUHealthPlan@osumc.edu)

Or submit a request via our website.





# Mindful Communication and Connection

## January Session

- The what and why
- Understanding the role of stress and how to manage it
- Starting with self

## February Session

- Reviewing take-aways and practice from last month
- Q&A
- Communicating and connecting with others



# Understanding Social Connection

“Social connections are sometimes called “social capital” for good reason: They are a valuable resource in life, creating moments of positivity and fun, supporting us through good times and bad, and exposing us to new ideas and new people. If we cultivate healthy connections, the research promises a longer, happier, and more prosperous life.”

From the Greater Good Science Center: [Why Practice Social Connection](#)



# Importance of Micro-Moments

**Connections are the micro-moments that build longer-term, more enduring relationships.**

“When you really connect with another person, a beautifully choreographed biological dance is unfolding as your smiles, gestures and posture come to mirror one another and come into sync. When you’re really connecting with somebody else, your heart rhythms come into sync, your biochemistries come into sync, even your neural firings come into sync. It’s as if in that micro-moment a single positive emotion is rolling across two brains and bodies at once, creating momentary resonance of good feeling and good will between you.”

From TedxLowerEastSide; [Barbara Fredrickson/Remaking Love](#)



# Benefits of Social Connection

- Are good for our health and vital to happiness.
- Add to our sense of meaning in experiences.
- Increase positive emotions in experiences.
- Are key to later well-being for youth.
- May help us live longer.
- Can help with professional success.

(from Great Good Science Center Magazine: [Why Cultivate Social Connections?](#))



# Risks of Disconnection

**Social isolation and loneliness are bad for our health, linked with increased risk for:**

- Heart disease and, stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Depression and anxiety
- Addiction
- Suicidality and self-harm
- Dementia and earlier death

(from CDC.gov: [Health Risks of Social Isolation and Loneliness](#))



# Benefits in the Workplace

Communication and connections are inextricably linked to **employee engagement and well-being.**


When both are strong, organizations see increases in **productivity, profit, and purposeful work.**






# Economic Impact

Companies with  
100,000 employees.

 **\$62.4 mil**

Companies with  
100 employees.

 **\$420,000**



# Risks of Poor Communication and Disconnection at Work

- Increased stress at work
- Increased stress at home (which can come back to work)
- Inflated urgency for *everything* (stressful!)
- Less humor and enjoyment
- Increases in tension, conflict, and misunderstanding
- Increases in mistakes, poor service, project delays / failures
- Lack of collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Decreased productivity, job satisfaction, morale, and engagement
- Obstacles to innovation, lost sales or customers / clients

Read more: [The Total Economic Impact of Poor Communication](#), [Unhealthy employee relationships with work aren't just personal](#), [Why You Need to Mend Any Poor Relationships With Your Employees](#), [Infographic cost of poor communication](#)



# Communication and Connection

- **Best Possible Self for Relationships:** Imagine what your ideal relationships would look like, as a first step toward cultivating them.
- **Capitalizing on Positive Events:** Show interest, enthusiasm, and positivity about someone's good news.
- **Active Listening:** Connect with someone by tuning in to what they're saying and showing empathy and understanding.
- **Mental Subtraction of Relationships:** Learn to appreciate a loved one more by imagining your life without them.
- **Gift of Time:** Invest in your relationships by spending quality time with people you care about.
- **36 Questions for Increasing Closeness:** Have a great conversation with a friend, family member, or romantic partner.
- **Avoiding the "Four Horsemen" in Relationships:** Prevent relationship doom by replacing toxic conflict behaviors with constructive ones.



## **Mindfulness Means...**

Paying attention on purpose.

Being fully present in the moment.

Awareness is non-judgmental,  
non-reactive, and as open-hearted  
as possible.

**Increasing  
tolerance for  
discomfort**

**Discernment  
Curiosity  
Compassion**

For more info visit Prakash Lab on YouTube, [Defining Mindfulness](#).

# General Mindfulness Awareness

Breath awareness

Activity of the mind

Emotions

Body sensations

Five senses (environment)

Daily living activities

Interactions with others

Intentions and Cravings (“urge surfing”)





# Three Components of Mindfulness





# Mindful Attitudes

- ♥ Non-Judgement
- ♥ Non-Striving
- ♥ Letting Go
- ♥ Acceptance
- ♥ Patience
- ♥ Beginner's Mind
- ♥ Trust
- ♥ Gratitude
- ♥ Generosity

Consciously cultivating certain attitudes can be quite helpful in getting the most out of meditation.



Image from Video, [Attitudinal Foundations of Mindfulness](#) (10 min); Prakash Lab YouTube Channel



## Beginner's Mind

- The beginner's mind offers infinite possibilities.
- We see that each moment is new. We've not had this moment before.
- We're aware of what we bring from our past into each moment, but do not get stuck in it.
- When we offer this openness to others, it is a gift that helps them feel truly seen and heard.

Read more: [Article-Beginner's Mind](#), Video: [Jon Kabat-Zinn, Beginner's Mind](#)





## Non-Judgement

Noticing experiences without the filters of evaluation (*good or bad; should or shouldn't; like or dislike*), but with curiosity and compassion.

Not aiming to be judgement-free, but to be aware of judgements as they arise as well as of their impact on our words, actions, and choices.

To be aware of when judging is helpful or needed and when it is not through use of curiosity, understanding, and discernment.

Read more: [Article-Non-Judgement](#), Video: [Jon Kabat-Zinn, Non-Judging](#)



# Mindless Communication

**Mindlessness: an inactive state of mind characterized by reliance on distinctions, categories drawn in the past:**

- The past over determines the present
- Trapped in a single perspective
- Insensitive to context
- Rule and routine governed
- Typically in error but rarely in doubt

Ellen Langer: [Mindfulness Over Matter](#)





# Barriers to Mindful Listening

**Pseudo-listening:** appearing to listen but ignoring or partially attending.

**Multi-tasking:** listening without full attention while completing another task.

**Stage-hogging:** listening to express own ideas.

**Selective listening:** taking in only what is relevant to own needs or interests

**Defensive listener:** taking in remarks as remarks as personal attacks.

**Ambushing listening:** attentive to errors or to use info against the other person.

**Insensitive listening:** ignore nonverbal messages and disregarding feelings.

**Insulated listening:** ignoring or avoiding certain topics in the conversation.

Info from: [kell.indstate.edu\\_stages-of-listening](http://kell.indstate.edu_stages-of-listening)



# Barriers to Compassionate Communication

**Moralistic Judgements:** “Who is what” – “She’s irresponsible.” “I’m lazy.” “They’re incompetent.” Related: evaluations and interpretations.

**Making Comparisons:** A form of judgement. Me vs. you; us vs. them.

**Denial of Responsibility:** “I had to.” “You made me mad.” “They told me to.”

**Making Demands:** Directly or indirectly threatens punishment or blame if they don’t comply.

**Deserve / Reward / Punishment:** Related to judgements. Thinking based on “who deserves” what and using reward or punishment to make people comply.

**Generalization Words:** Always, never, ever, whenever, seldom, frequently

**Gottman’s Four “Horsemen”:** Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, Stonewalling

From: [Non-Violent Communication, by Marshall B. Rosenberg, PhD](#) and [The Gottman Institute](#)



# Stress Impacts Communication

Our “fight or flight” response comes out in our words and non-verbal behaviors / expressions, often unintentionally.

- Harsh words or few words
- Harsh expressions and tone of voice
- Avoidance behaviors and body language
- Gossip and venting (*an attempt to connect; misguided support seeking*)
- Lack of presence / attention

**Listening to understand and non-violent communication skills help take the stress out of social interactions.**



# Need to Learn a New Language

**We learn language of defensiveness and judgement. We may not have the experience or skills to communicate in ways that facilitate quality connection.**

The Purpose of NVC: To help us connect with ourselves and others in a way that makes compassionate giving natural. Doing something for ourselves and other where our sole intention is to enrich life.

Language is used to facilitate connection through focusing on two key questions: What's alive in us? What would make life more wonderful?

Learning to identify feelings and clearly share them with others with a developed emotional vocabulary. To speak about what's inside of us vs. what's going on outside of us.

Learning to identify needs and clearly share them with others. Needs are life in action. If we have no needs, we're not really alive.



# STRESS

## A physiological response in the body.

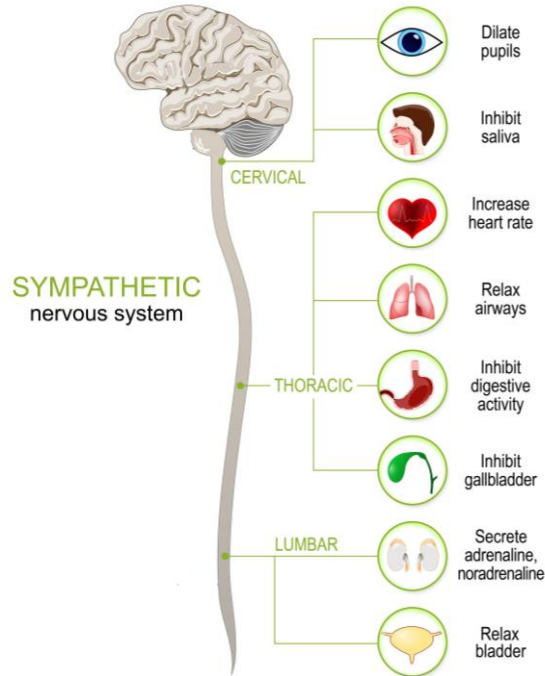


Image from iStock.com

### PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM DORSAL VAGAL COMPLEX

#### *Increases*

Fuel storage & insulin activity • Immobilization behavior (with fear)  
Endorphins that help numb and raise the pain threshold  
Conservation of metabolic resources

#### *Decreases*

Heart Rate • Blood Pressure • Temperature • Muscle Tone  
Facial Expressions & Eye Contact • Depth of Breath • Social Behavior  
Attunement to Human Voice • Sexual Responses • Immune Response

### SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

#### *Increases*

Blood Pressure • Heart Rate • Fuel Availability • Adrenaline  
Oxygen Circulation to Vital Organs • Blood Clotting • Pupil Size  
Dilation of Bronchi • Defensive Responses

#### *Decreases*

Fuel Storage • Insulin Activity • Digestion • Salivation  
Relational Ability • Immune Response

### PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM VENTRAL VAGAL COMPLEX

#### *Increases*

Digestion • Intestinal Motility • Resistance to Infection  
Immune Response • Rest and Recuperation • Health & Vitality  
Circulation to non-vital organs (skin, extremities)  
Oxytocin (neuromodulator involved in social bonds that allows immobility without fear) • Ability to Relate and Connect  
Movement in eyes and head turning • Prosody in voice • Breath

#### *Decreases*

Defensive Responses



# The Resilience Zone

Our “Window of Tolerance”

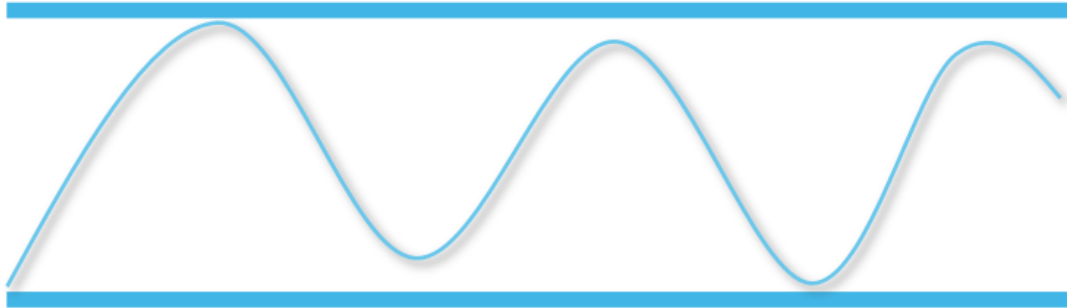


We can experience both highs and lows in this zone, and still respond with a lot of flexibility and adaptability.





**The size of our Resilience Zones can vary, meaning our capacity to tolerate stress varies.**

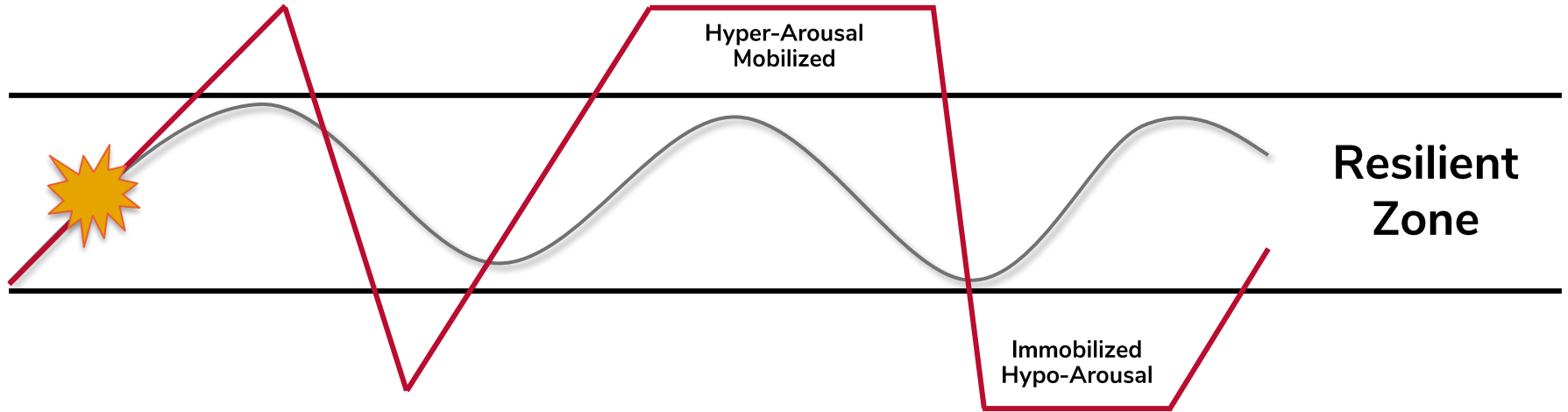


**A wider zone indicates a greater window of tolerance for stress and stressors.**

**A narrow zone means we're more likely to get bumped out into high or low zones.**



Stressful or traumatic triggers and events can send us out of our Resilient Zone.





















# Autonomic Nervous System

Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)

Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

 <u>Pupils dilate</u>	<u>Pupils constrict</u> 
 <u>Relaxes airways</u>	<u>Airways constrict</u> 
 <u>Increased heartbeat</u>	<u>Decreased heartbeatt</u> 
 <u>Inhibits stomach activity</u>	<u>Stimulates activity of the stomach</u> 
 <u>Inhibits intestines</u>	<u>Stimulates intestines</u> 
 <u>Inhibits gallbladder</u>	<u>Stimulates gallbladder</u> 
 <u>Bladder relaxes</u>	<u>Bladder contracts</u> 
 <u>Secrete epinephrine &amp; norepinephrine</u>	
 <u>Sweat glands stimulates secretion</u>	



## Hyper-arousal—Mobilized

Sympathetic Mode: Fight or Flight



Panic  
Fear  
Worry  
Irritation  
Impulsive  
Heart racing  
Increased stress hormones  
Aggression/irritability

Sense of Threat

Aggression/irritability

## Hypo-arousal—Immobilized

Parasympathetic Mode: Dorsal Vagal



Numb  
Disconnected  
Foggy  
Shut down  
Low energy  
Fatigue  
Dissociation

Collapse/Helpless



# Mindful Strategy #1

**Pay attention, on purpose, to yourself.**

Pause all activity, interaction, and goal-directed thinking to **check in with yourself** at least three times per day.

This is about *listening* to YOU.

Watch a 4-minute explanation video [here](#).

Practice with a 2-minute mindfulness break [here](#).



# Mindful Strategy #1

**Pay attention, on purpose, to yourself.**

- How you listen to yourself (body, thoughts, feelings, needs).
- How you speak to yourself about yourself (self-talk).
- How you listen and speak to others (presence, tone, verbal and non-verbal communication).
- How you speak about others (demands, judgements, clarity).



# LISTEN to Your Body – Sensation Tracking

**Notice what's happening in your body and learn to describe sensations.**

Tracking helps you to learn how to bring balance back to your nervous system by managing inner sensations.

**Acknowledge Stress:** WHERE it shows up in your body and WHAT it feels like.

**Shift Away from Stress:** Find a part of your body that feels OK or neutral – like a big toe. Focus on sensations there.

**PHYSICAL SENSATIONS**

COMMON WORDS	ENERGETIC QUALITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tight</li> <li>• Tense</li> <li>• Knotted</li> <li>• Sore</li> <li>• Achey</li> <li>• Pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaky</li> <li>• Trembly</li> <li>• Fluttery</li> <li>• Shivery</li> <li>• Wobbly</li> <li>• Short of breath</li> </ul>
ELECTRIC QUALITY	BLAH...MEH...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prickly</li> <li>• Tingly</li> <li>• Burning</li> <li>• Buzzy</li> <li>• Itchy</li> <li>• Pounding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empty</li> <li>• Dull</li> <li>• Hollow</li> <li>• Disconnected</li> <li>• Heavy</li> <li>• Drained</li> </ul>
WELLBEING/OPEN	CLOSED OFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaxed</li> <li>• Released</li> <li>• Energetic</li> <li>• Expansive</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Grounded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constricted</li> <li>• Choking</li> <li>• Rigid</li> <li>• Slunched</li> <li>• Suffocated</li> <li>• Imploding</li> </ul>

Image from: [letitshinecounseling.com/felt-sense](https://letitshinecounseling.com/felt-sense)



# NVC: Basic Needs We All Have

From PuddleDancerPress: [Feelings and Needs](#)

## Autonomy

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- Choosing dreams/goals/values
- Choosing plans for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values

## Celebration

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- Celebrating the creation of life and dreams fulfilled
- Celebrating losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)

## Integrity

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- Authenticity • Creativity
- Meaning • Self-worth

## Interdependence

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- Acceptance • Appreciation
- Closeness • Community
- Consideration
- Contribution to the enrichment of life
- Emotional Safety • Empathy

## Physical Nurturance

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- Air • Food
- Movement, exercise
- Protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals
- Rest • Sexual expression
- Shelter • Touch • Water

## Play

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- Fun • Laughter

## Spiritual Communion

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- Beauty • Harmony
- Inspiration • Order • Peace
- Honesty (the empowering honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations)
- Love • Reassurance
- Respect • Support
- Trust • Understanding



# NVC: Basic Feelings We All Have

## Feelings when needs are fulfilled

- Amazed
- Comfortable
- Confident
- Eager
- Energetic
- Fulfilled
- Glad
- Hopeful
- Inspired
- Intrigued
- Joyous
- Moved
- Optimistic
- Proud
- Relieved
- Stimulated
- Surprised
- Thankful
- Touched
- Trustful

## Feelings when needs are not fulfilled

- Angry
- Annoyed
- Concerned
- Confused
- Disappointed
- Discouraged
- Distressed
- Embarrassed
- Frustrated
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Impatient
- Irritated
- Lonely
- Nervous
- Overwhelmed
- Puzzled
- Reluctant
- Sad
- Uncomfortable





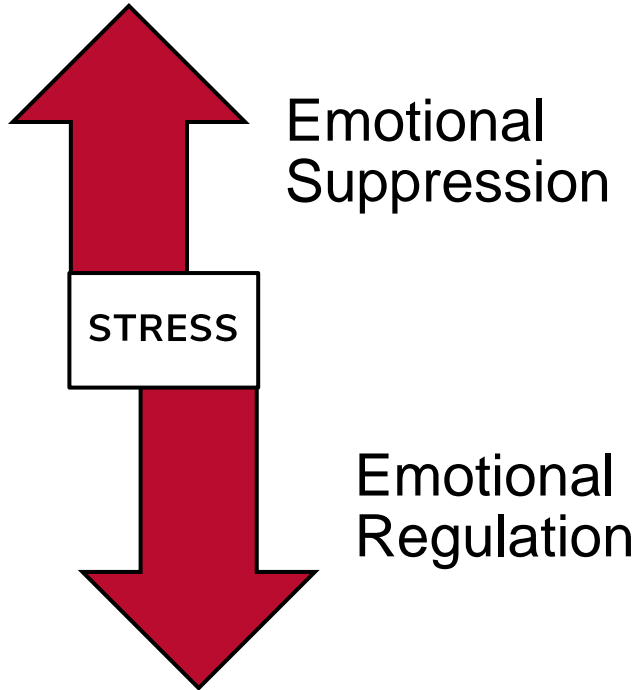
# Notice Stress and Negative Feelings

Read more about [this Notice and Name technique](#).

1. Tune into your body. What do you feel? Stress and emotions live in the body.
  2. Give the experience a name. Use [feeling words](#). “This is anger.” or “Scared.”
  3. Breathe. Focus on your breathing.
- ✓ *If you want to explore the experience, attend to the sensation of the feeling or stress in the body. Avoid going over the incident that triggered the negative emotion.*



# Emotional Regulation



Many of us are taught to control emotions by stifling the outward expression of them.

**This is NOT the same as regulation.** There is still an *inner experience* that needs to be addressed.

Emotions will linger in the body and mind without proper processing and regulation. This increases stress and wears on the body.



“Today is really hard for me.”

“I am doing the best I can and that’s enough.”

“May I be kind to myself right now?”

For more examples of self-compassionate phrases: [Self Compassionate Phrases for Stressful Times](#) OR [Self Compassion Phrases](#)

# *Self-Compassion*

*Kindness to Self*

*Common Humanity*

*Mindfulness*

**Further Reading on Self-Compassion**

[self-compassion.org](https://self-compassion.org)



# Self-Compassion Break

by Dr. Kristen Neff

**Think of a situation in your life that is causing you stress.** Notice the discomfort you feel in this situation.

**Acknowledge the discomfort** to yourself. You might say:

*“This is suffering” or “This is stress.” or “Ugh. This is hard.”*

**Acknowledge that you are not alone in this discomfort and difficulty.**

We all feel this way sometimes. We all struggle. This is our common humanity. Notice how it feels to know you’re not alone in this.

**Now bring your awareness to your heart-center.** And, from your heart, check in with yourself:

*“What do I need right now? May I be kind to myself? What do I need to hear to express kindness in this moment?”*

**Say something kind to yourself. Speak to yourself as you might a good friend** who is struggling.

**Notice how you feel when you offer yourself compassion** for your stressful situation.

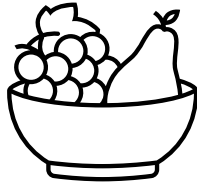


# Self-Care! Basic Maintenance = Resilience!



## MENTAL WELL-BEING

Mindful or deep breathing. Positive visualization. Meditation. Intention setting. Mental downtime.



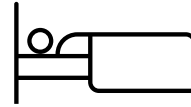
## NUTRITION

Whole or minimally processed foods and balanced food groups. Regular meals. Intuitive, mindful eating. Reduce “grazing.”



## HYDRATION

Water!  
Avoiding excess in caffeine, alcohol, sugary beverages



## REST

Naps  
Breaks  
Sleep!  
Low-impact activity  
Less productivity



## MOVEMENT

Stretching  
Walking  
Dancing  
Yoga  
Jogging  
Weightlifting  
Anything!



## MEANING AND PURPOSE

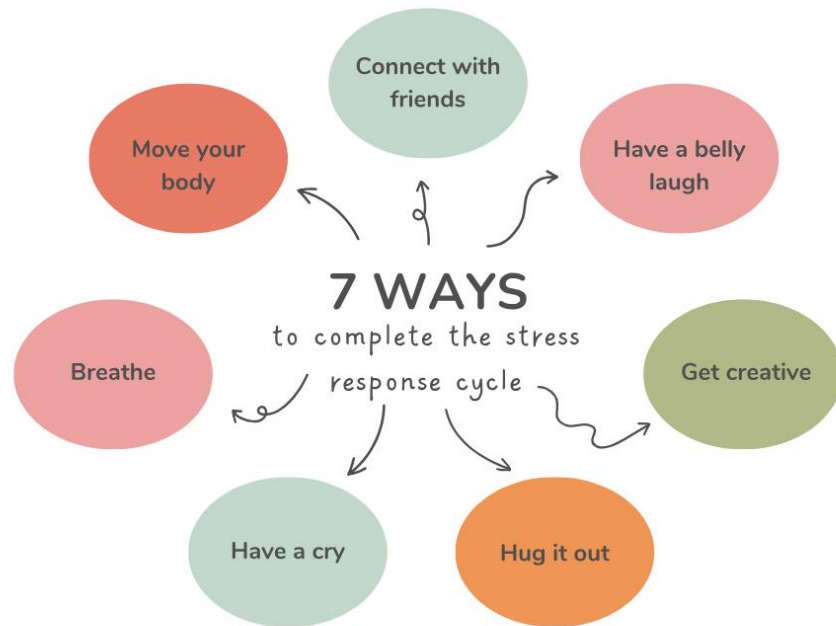
Prayer and meditation. Quality time with loved ones. Time in nature. Helping others. Creativity.



# Intentional Stress Recovery = Resilience!

Any recovery activity should:

- Restore your sense of agency and control
- Provide mental detachment from the stressor
- Generate positive emotions or at least be neutral / OK
- Be done with intention and purposeful attention
- Not be disrupted by guilt or judgement (this isn't luxurious or lazy! It's necessary!)





# Relaxation and Resilience Exercises

[Tracking sensations](#) in the body

[Grounding](#) with the physical environment

Grounding with the [five senses](#)

Self-soothing [gestures](#)

[Resourcing](#), savoring the details of what helps you feel good and safe

[Shift and stay](#) technique (attention management)

Deep, slow [breathing](#) for relaxation

[Heart-focused breathing](#)

[Quick Coherence](#) technique activating positive emotions (gratitude, loving-kindness, appreciation, ease)

[Self-compassionate](#) self-talk

Connecting stressful events to the care and connection of a loved one ([article](#))

Engage simple [mental visualizations](#) or [mindset metaphors](#)

Progressive [muscle relaxation](#) or [chair yoga](#) for releasing tension



# Seek and Use Support

**Seek support from trusted people. Use resources available to you.**

- Who is available?
- Who is reliable?
- Who is resourceful?
- Who is informed?
- Who is optimistic?
- Who is understanding?
- Who should be avoided/moderated?

**We need different things at different times.  
Different people have different things to offer.**

Use your self check-ins to determine what you need, and then reach out to the person most likely to be able to fulfill that support need.





# OSU Wellness Resources & Support

OSU Health Plan's [Archive of Webinars](#) – find programs for Active

OSU Health Plan's [Health Coaching](#) – Check out our [relaxation recordings!](#)

[Employee Assistance Program](#) – Check out their [Pause and Reset Activities!](#)

[Ohio State Integrative Medicine Center](#)

The Stress, Trauma and Resilience (STAR) Program at OSUMC: [Webinar Series](#), [Buckeye Paws](#), [Brief Emotional Support Team \(BEST\) Training](#)

Ohio State University Medical Center [Well-Being Resources](#), More [well-being resources](#) from OSUHR's site

OSU [Employee Discounts](#) and [Lifestyle Spending Account](#)

YP4H [Physical Activity](#), [Stress Management](#), and [Healthy Eating](#) Resources, plus [Virgin Pulse](#) reward programs

OSUMC [Exercise is Medicine](#) Program

OSU [Friday Meditation Group](#)

Find guided emotional well-being programming in [Rethink Care](#) through Virgin Pulse. Or try a [meditation app!](#)



# What is My Purpose for Communicating?

*Is it for me or for someone else?*

*Is it about me or about someone else?*

*Am I trying to solve a problem? Guide or advise?*

*Am I trying to confront a behavior? Set a boundary?*

*Am I trying to gather information?*

*Or provide information?*

*Am I trying to offer support/comfort?*

*Or am I seeking support?*

*Am I communicating for enjoyment, interest, or rapport building?*



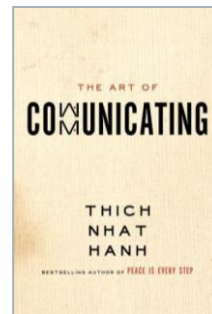
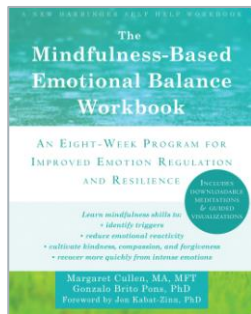
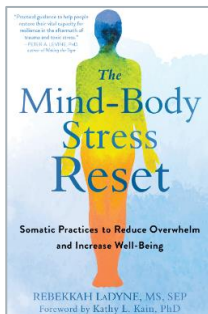
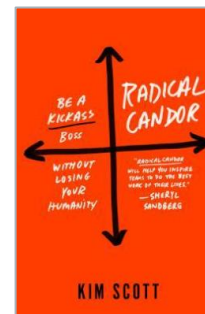
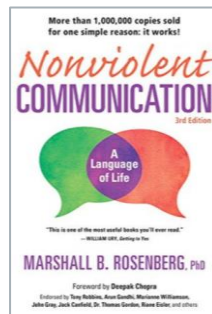
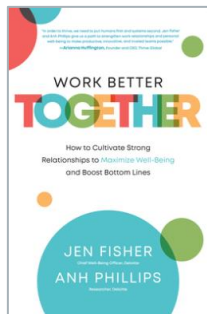
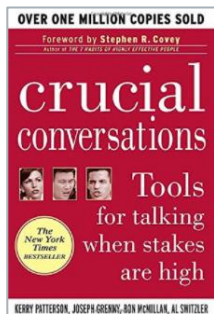
# Moments of High-Quality Connections

- 1. Respectful Engagement with *assumed positive intent***
  - Respect their value (*we all want to contribute; we all bring something to the table*)
  - Respect their work/strengths (*we all like to be acknowledged for what we do well*)
  - Respect their autonomy (*we're all working hard, doing the best we can right now*)
  - Respect their struggles (*we're all going through something*)
- 2. Task Enabling:** Help others succeed. Provide resources or remove obstacles.
- 3. Trust:** Allow others to manage decisions and resources. Share information. Trust = safety.
- 4. Playing, Laughter, Enjoyment:** Have fun. Share a sincere smile. Micro-moments matter.
- 5. Signals of Presence:** *Show* them they have your full attention with verbal and non-verbal signals.

Read more from GGSC Magazine: [Four Ways to Create High-Quality Connections at Work](#), [Four Ways to Help Your Coworkers Feel Respected](#)



# Books to Explore





# What's Next?

## For the next month...

- Pay attention on purpose to yourself
- Work on yourself
- Manage stress
- Observe your communication and connections with others

## Next Session: Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>

- Review your take-aways
- Questions and Answers
- Bringing mindfulness into conversations with others