

Starting the Year Mindfully

Starting a new year, coming off of a two-week school break, new resolutions and on-going challenges are a few of the things we have on our plates in January. There is a lot of research that has shown the power of mindfulness in reducing stress and anxiety, increasing mental well-being, helping with sleep patterns, and also overall emotional regulation.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a way to turn off auto-pilot and bring awareness to the present. It may seem easy but, in a world full of schedules, appointments, deadlines and other daily stressors it can be a challenge to disconnect ourselves from auto pilot. Daniel J. Siegel defines mindfulness:

“Mindfulness in its most general sense is about waking up from a life on automatic, and being sensitive to novelty in our everyday experiences...Instead of being on automatic and mindless, mindfulness helps us to awaken, and by reflecting on the mind we are enabled to make choices and thus change becomes possible”

Mindfulness is not only turning off auto pilot and staying aware but doing so non-judgmentally – of yourself, of others, of your experience. In that age of social media likes, followers, and commentaries this non-judgmental stance is something we could all benefit from doing. Jon Katat-Zinn writes:

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally”

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Research in the area of mindfulness shows benefits in the following areas:

- Improved working memory
- Lowered anxiety levels
- Reduced emotional reactivity
- Reduced stress
- Regulating emotions
- Less distractible
- Enhancing sleep

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are many ways to bring mindfulness into your life from a regular time every day to finding opportunities for mindfulness skills in daily life.

- Bring mindfulness to a walk by focusing on what you see, hear, feel. Listen to the sound of your steps, notice the feeling of your legs, notice what you smell.
- Try listening to someone mindfully by not crafting what you are going to respond and thinking ahead but rather listen fully to what the other person is saying – sounds easy but you will be surprised!

- When you or your child are having a difficult time take a moment and focus just on breathing, in and out. Notice what your body feels like. Notice thoughts that pop into your head – AND LET THEM GO. Just “be” for even 2 minutes. It can be very powerful to take even just one or two minutes! And a great example to set for your children.

So perhaps you can find some time in your day, your week, your month to turn off auto pilot and practice a little mindfulness!

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