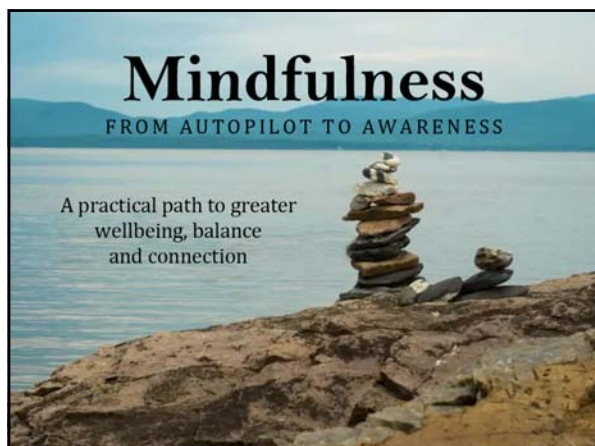
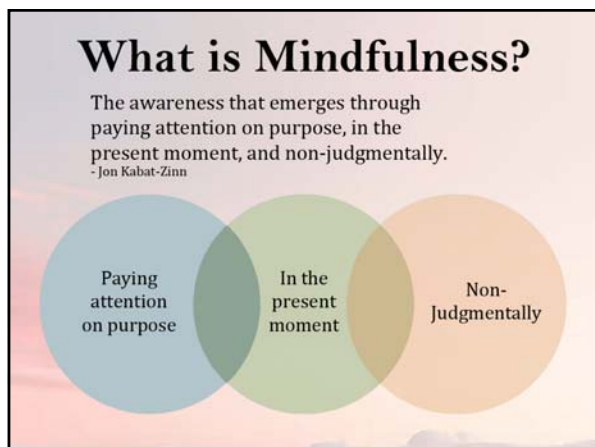








The Autonomic Nervous System

Our nervous system is like a personal surveillance system, always asking: "Am I safe?"



Sympathetic Nervous System

Mobilizes us for action

- Fight, flight, fawn
- Floods system with adrenaline
- Increases heart rate, energy and alertness

Parasympathetic Nervous System

Helps us rest, digest and connect

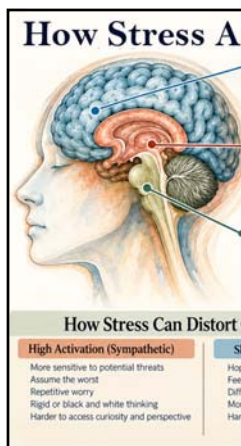
- Slows heart rate
- Supports healing and recovery
- Calms the body and mind
- Engages the social nervous system

Nervous System States

Each state shows up in the body, mind and behavior. All states are normal and have a healthy activation when the system is flexible to move from state to state in response to our environment.

	SAFE & CONNECTED (Ventral Vagal)	Mobilized (Sympathetic)	Shut Down (Dorsal Vagal)
How it Shows up	Calm, present, open	Alert, activated, on guard	Numb, disconnected
Body sensations	Steady breath and heart rate relaxed muscles warmth, ease	Increased heart rate, shallow, fast breathing, muscle tension, high energy	Low energy, feeling heavy, slowed down, weak muscles, foggy
Mind & emotions	Clear, curious, grounded, able to feel and think	Anxious, overwhelmed, focused on threat, harder to think clearly	Numb, empty, hopeless, hard to feel or engage
Behavior	Engaged, connected flexible, resilient	Fight, flight, fawn, reacting, doing, avoiding	Withdrawn, shut down, disengaged, dissociated
Healthy activation	Regulation and resilience, connection with self and others, capacity to work, rest and play	Energy and motivation, alert, focused attention, ability to take action, mobilized for appropriate challenge	Rest, recovery, conservation of energy, natural pause and healing, ability to re-engage when safe

How Stress Affects Us



Prefrontal Cortex

THINKING BRAIN

- Planning & decision-making
- Attention & focus
- Self-reflection
- Perspective & flexibility

Limbic System

EMOTIONS BRAIN

- Emotions & memory
- Motivation
- Threat detection
- Attaches meaning to experience

Brain Stem

SURVIVAL BRAIN

- Breathing, heart rate, arousal
- Essential life functions
- Automatic responses
- Prepares the body for action

When Stress Increases

Brain shifts into survival mode
Resources move toward what feels urgent.

Attention narrows
We become more sensitive to potential threats.

Thinking becomes less effective
Harder to think clearly and access perspective.

Body responds automatically
Even when we know we're safe, the body can still activate as if there is danger.

Physical Effects of Stress

- Increased heart rate & blood pressure
- Faster or shallower breathing
- Muscle tension
- Changes in digestion
- Disrupted sleep
- Affects immune function, pain & fatigue

How Stress Can Distort Our Thinking

High Activation (Sympathetic)

- More sensitive to potential threats
- Assume the worst
- Repetitive worry
- Rigid or black and white thinking
- Harder to access curiosity and perspective

Shutdown (Dorsal Vagal)

- Hopelessness or helplessness
- Feeling like nothing matters
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- More withdrawn
- Harder to see other possibilities

State creates story.

Our thoughts are important, but they aren't always an accurate reflection of what's happening in the present moment.

This Impacts Our Relationships

- More reactive or defensive
- Less able to communicate effectively
- Misinterpret others' intentions
- Harder to recognize available support



Why Mindfulness Matters

A regular mindfulness practice can help us:

Reduce stress	Less reactivity, more capacity to respond
Increase emotional balance	More steadiness through daily ups and downs
Improve focus	Greater attention and better decision making
Strengthen relationships	More presence, empathy and connection
Build resilience	More flexibility and capacity to navigate life challenges
Feel more present and alive	A deeper experience of joy, meaning and purpose

S.A.F.E.

A Simple Practice For Any Nervous System State

These practices can help us meet whatever is here with more awareness and choice.

S	Stop & Sense Stop and sense what is happening in your body right now.
A	Allow Let what is here be here without judgement.
F	Flow Move with what your body is asking of you. Allow movement, breath or rest.
E	Expand Choose to practice S.A.F.E. so you can build the capacity to move beyond familiar patterns of survival and into a life of greater connection, meaning, and possibility.



A Mindfulness Practice

Let's experience a few practices together to center, connect and build awareness.

1	Orient & Center Arrive and allow the body to settle into safety.
2	Connection Breath Invite connection through breath and touch.
3	Body Awareness Notice what is here without judgment.
4	Mindful Movement Awaken the body and experience movement with awareness.

Bringing Mindfulness Into Everyday Life

Mindfulness isn't something we just do on a cushion - it's a way of being.

Everyday Moments

Bring full attention to activities without multi-tasking.

Use Your Senses

Notice what you see, feel, smell, hear and taste.

Be Kind to Yourself

Notice and release self-judgment.

Create Touchpoints

Pair mindfulness with daily routines.

Cultivate Connection

Be more present with yourself and others.



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