

# Mindfulness Tools for Equine-assisted Services

by

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## Introduction

- ▶ William (Bill) Marchand, MD, LFAPA
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  - ▶ Director of Research and Equine-assisted Services, Whole Health Service, VA Salt Lake City Health Care System
  - ▶ Professor of Psychiatry (Clinical), University of Utah School of Medicine and Adjunct Professor of Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences, Utah State University.
  - ▶ Certified by PATH, Intl. as an Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning and certified by Eagala to provide Equine-assisted Psychotherapy
  - ▶ Mindfulness teacher and practitioner
  - ▶ Horse person
  - ▶ Mindful Horsemanship



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## Agenda

- ▶ What is mindfulness?
- ▶ How mindfulness can support, horsemanship, EAS, and life
- ▶ Developing a mindfulness practice
- ▶ Q & A

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## Stop me with questions

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## What is mindfulness?



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## What is Mindfulness?

- ▶ Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention in a particular way:
  - ▶ On purpose
  - ▶ Moment-by-moment
  - ▶ Non-judgmentally



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## What is Mindfulness?

- ▶ Maintaining focus on what is happening in the present moment **AND**
- ▶ Observing our own sensations, thoughts and emotions without judgement

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## Autopilot

- ▶ The opposite of mindfulness
- ▶ Mind wandering
- ▶ The normal state of the mind
- ▶ Often thinking about the past or future
- ▶ Sometimes not helpful

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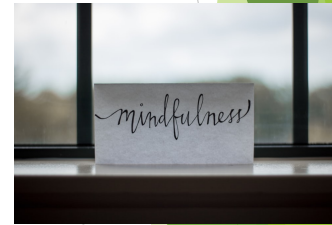
## Meditation

- ▶ Meditation derives from Latin *meditari*, which means to engage in contemplation or reflection.
- ▶ Encompasses various practices generally aimed at bringing mental processes under voluntary control through focusing attention and awareness.
- ▶ Mindfulness meditation is one type of meditation practice

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## Mindfulness practices

- ▶ Evidence-based mindfulness interventions
- ▶ Formal meditation practices
- ▶ Mindfulness in everyday life



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## Mindfulness practices

- ▶ Evidence-based mindfulness interventions
  - ▶ Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
  - ▶ Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)
  - ▶ Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC)
  - ▶ Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention (MBRP)
  - ▶ Mindfulness-oriented Recovery Enhancement (MORE)
  - ▶ Mindfulness-based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT)

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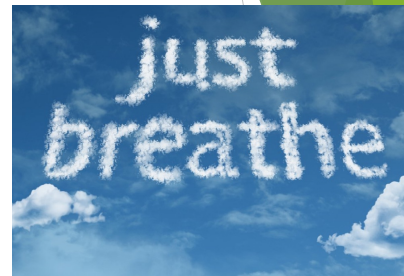
## Aims of Mindfulness-based Interventions

- ▶ Learn about mindfulness
- ▶ Establish a regular mindfulness practice
- ▶ Be able to recognize when the mind is in autopilot mode
- ▶ Develop the ability to move out of autopilot and into mindfulness

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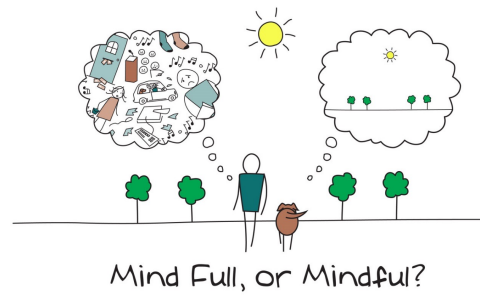
## Mindfulness

- ▶ Evidence of benefit for:
  - ▶ Self-care & stress management
  - ▶ Sports performance enhancement
  - ▶ Specific mental health and physical disorders



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## How does mindfulness work?



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## Autopilot

- ▶ Mindfulness is the opposite of autopilot, which includes:
  - ▶ Thinking about the past or future
  - ▶ Ruminations and worry
  - ▶ Habitual thinking and behavior patterns
  - ▶ Emotional reactivity
  - ▶ Wanting things to be different
  - ▶ Resistance to physical and emotional discomfort

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## Autopilot

- ▶ Can be helpful:
  - ▶ Multitasking
  - ▶ Don't have to think about every step of a task
  - ▶ Learn from the past
  - ▶ Planning for the future

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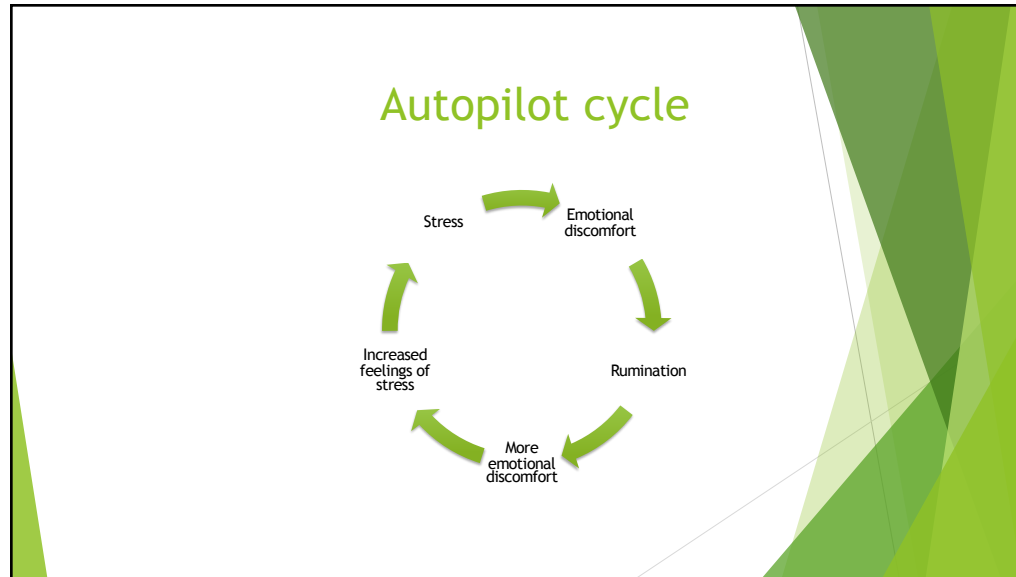
It's ok to be on  
autopilot  
sometimes...

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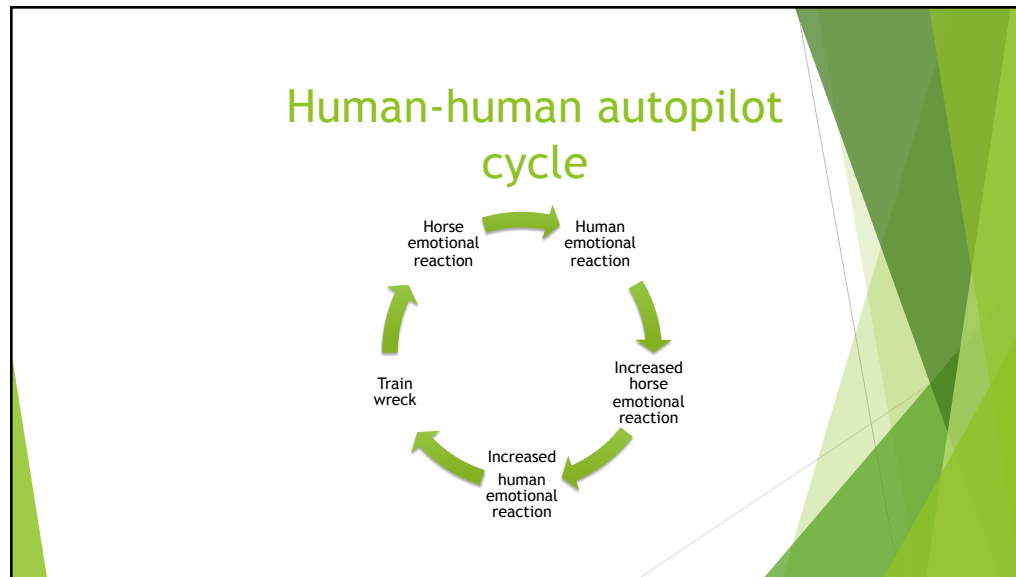
Other times it is not such a great idea...



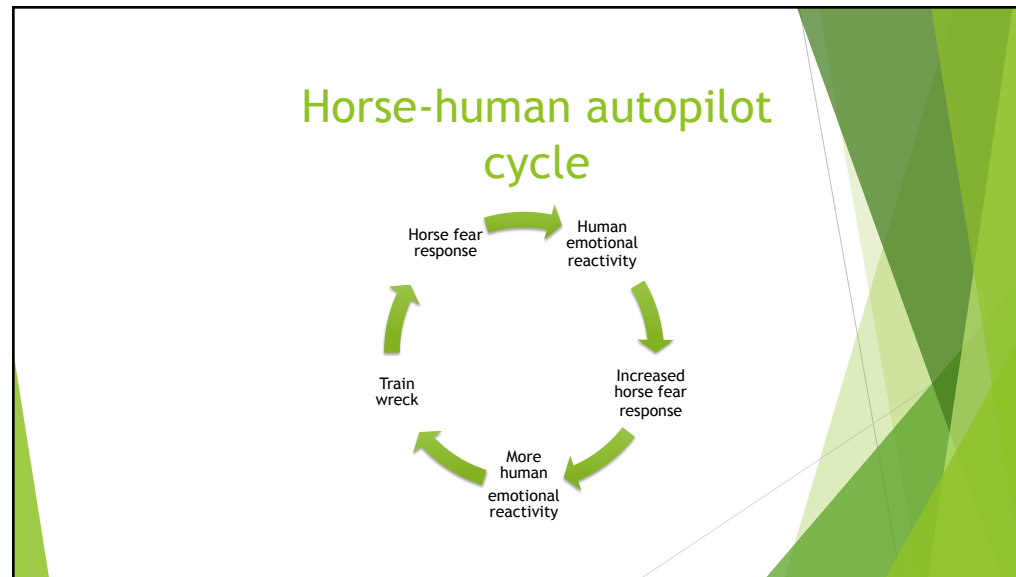
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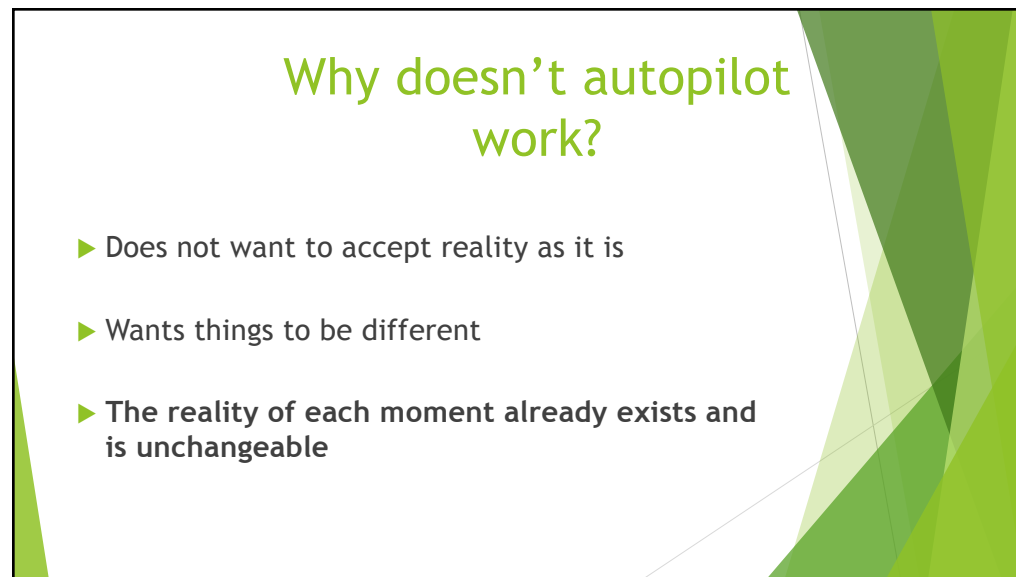
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## Why doesn't autopilot work?

- ▶ The reality of each moment already exists and is unchangeable
- ▶ Our only choices are acceptance or resistance

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## Why doesn't autopilot work?

- ▶ Often well-worn thinking ruts that keep us stuck - rather than finding solutions
- ▶ Limits our ability to shift perspective and see options

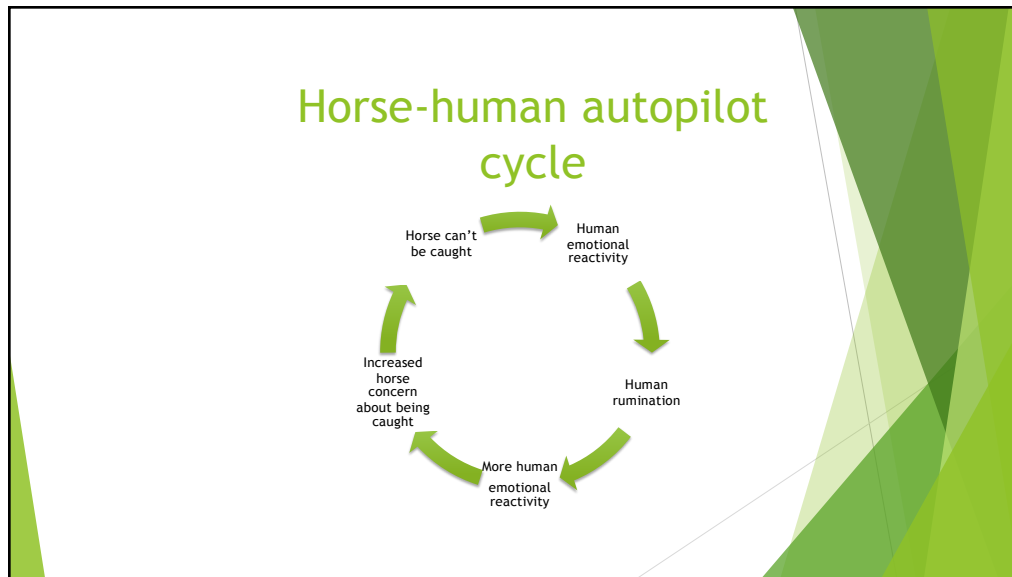
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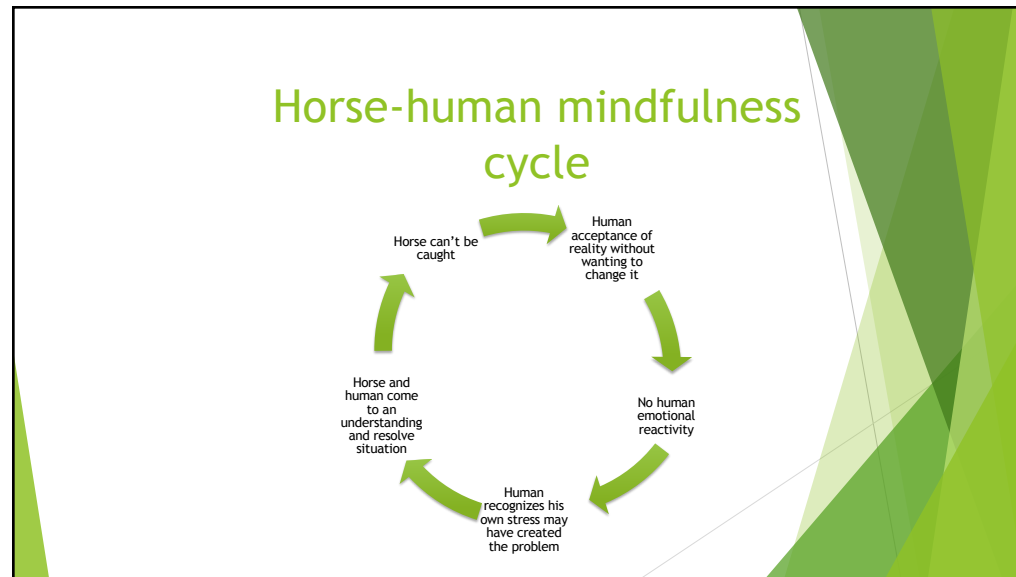
## Example

- ▶ My new horse, Rye
- ▶ Bought as a “project” with history of very rough treatment
- ▶ Hard to catch
- ▶ Making great progress
- ▶ Until the afternoon the farrier comes...
- ▶ So, what happened?

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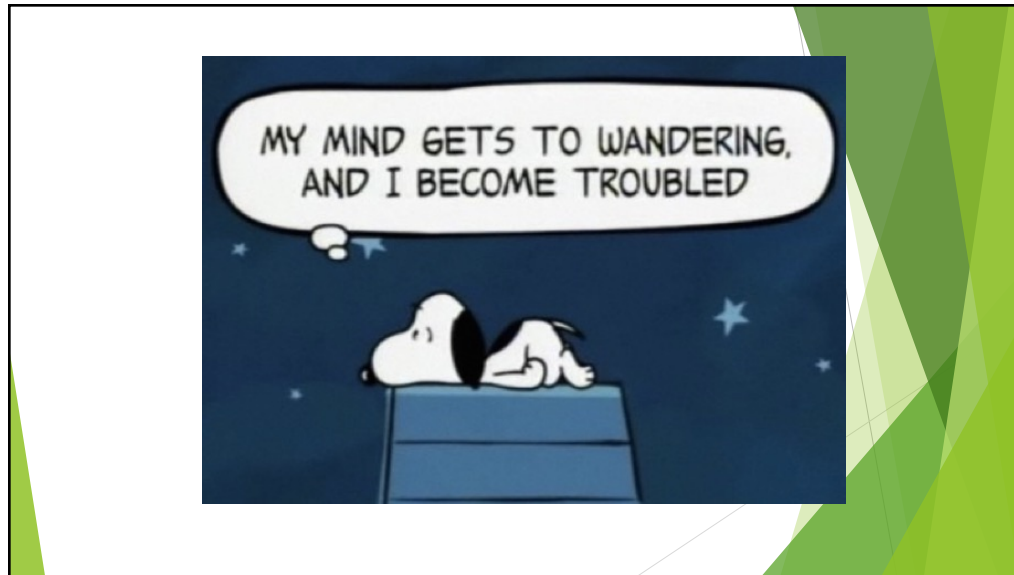
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## Autopilot interferes with happiness

- ▶ Autopilot is never satisfied
  - ▶ It always wants things to be different
    - ▶ Get something we don't have
    - ▶ Get rid of something we do have

*Never Satisfied*

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## How does mindfulness work?

- ▶ Radical acceptance of reality as it is
- ▶ Interrupts the autopilot cycle
- ▶ Standing beside the river rather than being swept away
- ▶ Brain rewiring through neural plasticity
- ▶ Reduced emotional reactivity



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## Mindfulness and sports performance

- ▶ Reduced rumination and regulation of negative emotion likely contribute to enhanced sports performance
- ▶ Josefsson, T., et al., *Mindfulness Mechanisms in Sports: Mediating Effects of Rumination and Emotion Regulation on Sport-Specific Coping*. *Mindfulness* (N Y), 2017. 8(5): p. 1354-1363.

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## Mindfulness and horsemanship

- ▶ Reduced rumination and regulation of negative emotion can be expected to help us have better and more satisfying relationships with our equine partners, coworkers, and clients

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## Mindfulness and horsemanship

- ▶ Mindfulness can help us be more attuned to subtle horse body language

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## Mindfulness and horsemanship

- ▶ Mindfulness enhance our body awareness so that we can communicate more effectively to our horse during both ground and mounted work

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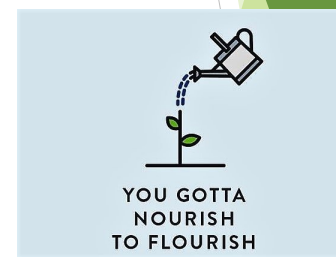
## Mindfulness cycle



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## Using mindfulness for ourselves and in EAS work

- ▶ Self-care
- ▶ Mindfulness-informed EAS
- ▶ Prevention of burnout



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## Using mindfulness for self-care

- ▶ Practicing mindfulness can help us:
  - ▶ Manage situations that are stressful and emotionally or physically uncomfortable
  - ▶ This particularly includes dealing with disturbing EAS situations

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## Using mindfulness for self-care

- ▶ Practicing mindfulness can help us by:
  - ▶ Recognizing when others are on autopilot
  - ▶ Avoiding making our own stress worse by falling into our habitual thinking, emotional and behavior patterns
  - ▶ Enhancing our ability to let situations arise and pass

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## Using mindfulness for self-care

- ▶ Habitual autopilot thinking patterns that are often unhelpful:
  - ▶ Wanting things to be different
  - ▶ Resistance to the emotional discomfort
  - ▶ Self-criticism
  - ▶ Need to fix things or achieve a specific outcome
  - ▶ Ruminating after the situation is over

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## Using mindfulness for self-care

- ▶ By being mindfully aware, we are often able to:
  - ▶ Avoid being carried away by our thoughts and emotions
  - ▶ Allow situations to arise and pass
  - ▶ Accept reality as it is
  - ▶ Avoid burnout and lead happier and more satisfying lives

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## Developing a personal mindfulness practice

- ▶ In-person or virtual courses:
  - ▶ Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
- ▶ Books
  - ▶ Anything by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- ▶ Guided meditation podcasts -
  - ▶ <https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/resources/multimedia/index.asp#downloadable-audio-files--podcasts>
- ▶ Meditation apps

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## Developing a personal mindfulness practice

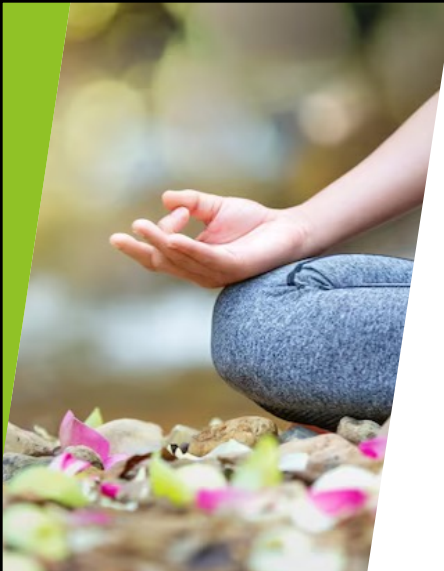
- ▶ Practice is the key
- ▶ We need to practice when we don't need it to be able to use it when we do need it

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## Developing a personal mindfulness practice

- ▶ Ways to practice
  - ▶ Dedicated meditation sessions
  - ▶ Short practices to use when stressed or upset
  - ▶ Mindfulness in life

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## Developing a personal mindfulness practice

- ▶ Dedicated meditation sessions (guided or unguided)
  - ▶ Set aside time and space to practice
  - ▶ Guided is usually best in the beginning
  - ▶ Focusing on the breath is a great option
  - ▶ Five minutes per day is a good starting goal

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## Developing a personal mindfulness practice

- ▶ Brief practices when needed
  - ▶ Short practices to use when stressed or upset
  - ▶ Check-in meditation is a good option
    - ▶ Focus on the physical sensations of breathing
    - ▶ Check in with the body, mind and emotions
    - ▶ End the meditation

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## Developing a personal mindfulness practice

- ▶ Mindfulness in life

- ▶ We can do anything mindfully...



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## Questions?



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## Contact information

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