

# Self-Care Guide for Teachers



Schools

# Table of contents

Introduction	3
What Is mindfulness?	4
Self-care practices for teachers	6
Take a deep breath	7
Meditate regularly	8
Prioritize sleep	10
Create a bedtime routine	12
Train your mind	14
Make or break a habit	15
Weave mindfulness into your daily life	16
Track your mood	17
Practice gratitude	19
Befriend yourself	20
Let it go	21
Do a digital detox	23
Go out	24



At the heart of a mindful classroom is a healthy and happy teacher. Studies show that the entire classroom benefits when the teacher develops a personal meditation or relaxation practice. Not to mention, you improve your emotional wellbeing and reduce the risk of burnout.

If you find yourself feeling guilty for prioritizing self-care as a teacher, we invite you to let go of the idea that taking care of yourself is selfish, and remember that when you're thriving you naturally have more energy, creativity, and empathy to offer your students. It's a win-win!

This guide begins by defining mindfulness and its formal and informal practices. We start there because self-care is exponentially more effective when it's infused with mindfulness. It's the difference between taking a bath with a clenched jaw while running through your to-do list versus taking the opportunity to

breathe deeply and letting the warmth of the water soothe your weary mind. The way you do something is just as important as the act of doing it in the first place.

The rest of the guide is filled with self-care tips and resources to help you feel healthier and happier in the classroom and beyond. We hope you and your students all reap the benefits of these simple yet powerful practices.



# What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment on purpose with kindness and curiosity. Rooted in Eastern contemplative traditions, mindfulness is non-religious and non-dogmatic and is practiced by people from all walks of life around the world with diverse cultures and spiritual beliefs. The essence of mindfulness is simple. We practice coming home to the here and now. This can be tricky because the mind is a great time-traveler, planning for the weekend or replaying an embarrassing experience. The body, on the other hand, is only ever in one place. So we use our body as an anchor to bring our mind into the present moment. Give it a try. Can you feel the sensation of the soles of your feet? Can you notice the feeling in your chest? Can you tune in to your breathing? By coming home to the body and the senses, we cultivate an awareness of life as we live it, from moment to moment. This is mindfulness.

Mindfulness has both formal and informal practices. Formally, to practice mindfulness, we take time apart from the rush of our day to sit, lie down, or bring focused attention to the tasks of walking and eating. There are core formal mindfulness practices which breathing meditation, body scan, mindful movement, mindful walking, and mindful eating. These formal practices are where we really build the muscle of focused attention and compassionate insight. The length of formal practice can range from 5 min - 1 hour with the potential to go on for much longer periods of uninterrupted silence. Some of the barriers to formal practice include finding the time, falling asleep, discomfort, and feeling like you are doing it wrong. All of these barriers are part of the practice. Developing a new skill is challenging and rewarding work. Formal practice asks us to actively work to create time in our days and years to slow down, rest, connect with ourselves and breathe.

While the barriers may seem immense, any small step you can take towards developing a regular formal practice will reap great rewards.

Mindfulness can also be practiced informally, amidst the rush and whirl of our days. We practice mindfulness informally when we take a deep breath before the start of classroom period, or when we simply become aware of the sensation of walking as we move between classes, we can notice the color and taste of our food at lunch hour, and we can take a moment to look into the eyes of a loved one at the end of a hectic day. These moments of mindfulness are important as well. While we may not be wearing special clothing or sitting peacefully on a mountain top, we are still practicing present moment awareness through the demands of a normal day. Informal practice can be an extraordinary way to bring more depth and pleasure to repetitive tasks and as a resource for times when life gets particularly tough.

Can I take a breath before a difficult conversation?  
Can I notice the sensations in my stomach when I say yes to something when really I want to say no?  
These moments of mindfulness cultivate a stronger relationship with ourselves, our bodies, and our own knowing.

We said that mindfulness is a simple practice. It is simple, but it is not easy. Coming home to ourselves can often be an overwhelming experience; all of our disappointments, fears, and anxieties for the future are faced. The work of turning towards ourselves requires courage as we forge a new, uncharted path of simplicity, kindness, and awareness and step away from the well-worn groove of numbing, rushing, and pushing. For this reason, mindfulness is not a neutral, unfeeling practice. In fact, mindfulness could also be heartfulness, because at its core it is a kind, compassionate, curious interest in what is happening. Mindfulness turns the kindness we would extend to a best friend towards ourselves. Remember to always bring this warm, nurturing attitude into your practice, for it is truly the best part.



## Self-care practices for teachers

Consider the following suggestions like a menu rather than another to-do list. Pick the ideas that appeal to you and feel doable. Then come back for more, as you're ready.

We increase our likelihood of adopting and maintaining new habits when changes are incremental. Overhauling every aspect of our daily life at once is difficult, uncomfortable, and ultimately, won't lead to more ease. Take your time and remember that small steps add up over time.

Explore the following tips and resources to discover what feels most nourishing to you.

# Take a deep breath

When life gets busy, there's often a snowball effect. Busyness leads to more busyness, which eventually leads to stress. If we don't take time to interrupt the "snowball" from rolling, it gets bigger, faster, and harder to stop, sometimes ending in burnout or a crash.

Pausing regularly throughout your day to take a few deep breaths is a simple yet powerful way to slow down. It may even stop the momentum of the rolling "snowball". The beauty of the breath as a supportive tool is that you can access it anywhere – a noisy classroom, a tough conversation, a traffic jam, or an important video call with technical difficulties.

Deepening the breath soothes the nervous system and helps us to shift from a state of stress to a state of relaxed attention. It can also brighten our mood and energize the body. So the next time you find yourself reaching for your third cup of coffee, try a breathing exercise first. Your caffeine fix will still be there if you need it afterwards!

Here are three ways to take a deep breath and counter the effects of stress on your mind and body:

## Breathe Bubble

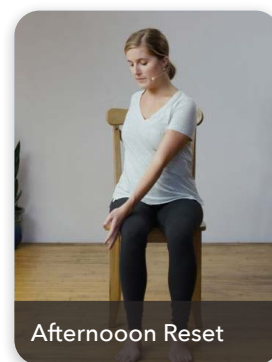
- A simple breathing exercise to calm and recharge. It only takes a minute and acts like a reset button.

## Panic SOS

- A 4-minute grounding meditation that works with the breath to ease panic and anxiety.

## Afternoon Reset

- A seated movement practice to rejuvenate the mind and relieve stiffness in the neck, shoulders, and back.

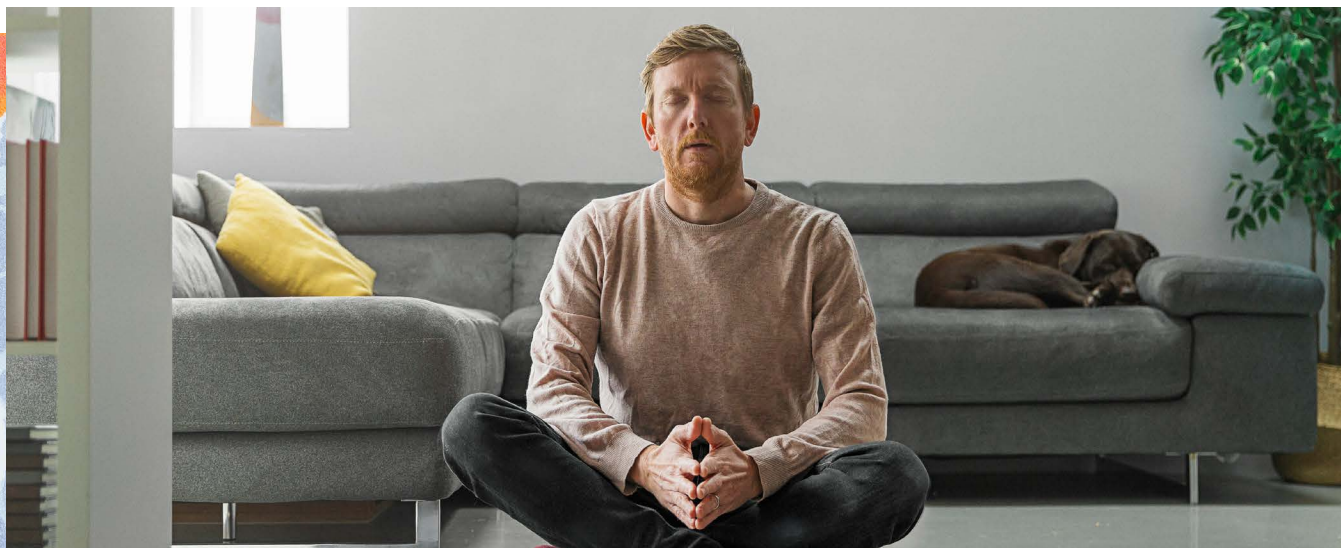


### **CALM TIP**

Bringing a hint of a smile to the lips during breathing exercises helps to relax the jaw and soften tension in the facial muscles.

“You must be friends with silence to hear. ”

– Joy Harjo



## Meditate regularly

Teaching is a demanding and stressful job, and the rates of professional burnout are high. One of the overarching stressors arises from the deep level of care teachers feel for their students, and the pressure they put on themselves to help. While this is a positive response, it can feel painful if teachers are unable to support students who are struggling. Feeling helpless and under-resourced in the face of suffering can lead to “compassion fatigue”, a form of burnout commonly experienced by those in helping professions. The good news is that it’s possible to be both compassionate and passionate as a teacher without running yourself into the ground.

Meditation makes it easier to balance the care we have for others with our own self-care, by tuning in to how we might be overextending ourselves and ignoring the body’s distress cues. Ultimately,

the awareness that develops through a meditation practice can help you get clear on what you need to feel happier and healthier.

Consider meditation as a training that prepares you to meet the challenging circumstances you face in your personal and professional life with clarity, kindness and balance. Practicing at home will help you to bring mindfulness into your classroom with more ease and authenticity. And even if you decide not to formally introduce mindfulness to your students, they’ll naturally benefit from the shift in your state of being as you integrate the practice into your routine.



Here are three ways to get started today:

### Daily Calm

- Calm offers a unique meditation and mindfulness teaching every day. Our members credit Tamara’s soothing voice and gentle wisdom as their go-to for developing a regular meditation practice.



### How to Meditate

- Calm’s 30-day intro series is a no-nonsense approach to meditation. Perfect for beginners to learn the basics without the fuff, while long-time meditators love experiencing the practice anew via Jeff’s fresh perspective and humor.

### Meditation Guide

- We created this journal to set you up for success in beginning (or expanding) your own personal meditation practice. Like any habit, it requires a mix of intention and practical action that honors your current circumstance.



### **CALM TIP**

Make meditation a daily habit by pairing it with an already established routine like waking up, eating lunch or winding down in the evening.

# Prioritize sleep

Many teachers struggle to get enough sleep during the school year. In an attempt to stay on top of things, you might be staying up late to finish a lesson plan, waking up early to mark papers, or tossing and turning over work issues at night. While the intention is well-meaning, sacrificing sleep comes at the expense of our overall wellbeing. With a lack of sleep comes less patience, difficulty focusing, and decreased motivation and creativity in being able to tackle problems.

Restful sleep prepares us to take on whatever the day throws our way, and helps us meet work and life with more energy, efficiency and peace.

Here are eight ways to sleep better so that you can walk into the classroom feeling bright, calm, and resilient:

## Sleep Stories

- Soothing tales read by well-known voices –bedtime stories for grown-ups. Try it out and see if what worked for you as a kid still works now!

## Deep Sleep Release

- Listening to sleep meditations at bedtime settles the mind and relaxes the body so that you can fall asleep sooner and more reliably.

## Ocean Waves

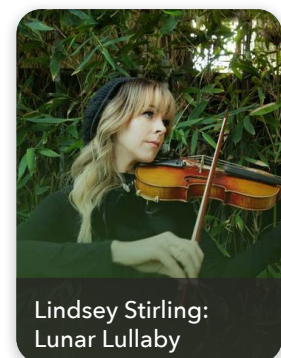
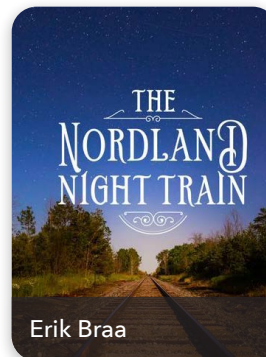
- If your sleep is disrupted by outside noise, try Calm Soundscapes. You can play these soothing forms of white noise for as long as you need to mask unwanted sound.

## Lunar Lullaby by Lindsey Stirling

- Calm’s meditative music tracks can help you unwind and settle into sleep more quickly.

“The best bridge between despair and hope is a good night’s sleep.”

– Matthew Walker



## Gently Back to Sleep

- For some, it's not falling asleep that's so tricky, it's getting back to sleep. We have meditations designed to help you stay relaxed if you wake up, before easing you back to slumber.

## Evening Wind Down

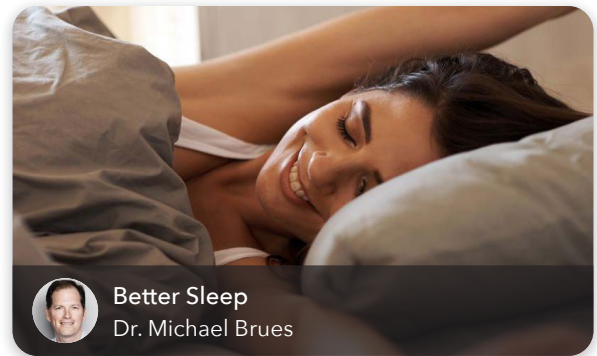
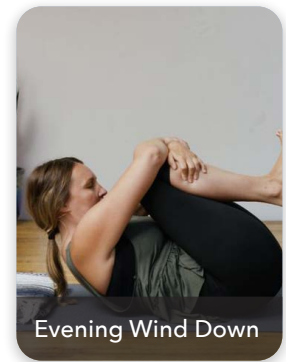
- Calm Body helps prepare the body for rest and sleep with a gentle stretching sequence that you can do in bed.

## Sleep Better Masterclass

- Delve into the science behind getting a good night's sleep with our Calm Masterclass. We recommend listening during the day when you're alert and can soak up all of the helpful information.

## Sleep Guide

- A guidebook and journal to help you enhance the quality of your sleep through small, doable changes.



### **CALM TIP**

If your brain is caught up in a whirlwind of thoughts at night, try journaling before bed. Write down any worries, to-dos, reflections, and anything else that's on your mind to reassure your brain that you'll attend to them tomorrow.

“When you say ‘Yes’ to others, make sure you are not saying ‘No’ to yourself.”

– Paolo Coehlo



## Create a bedtime routine

Routine eliminates the stress of having to make decisions. It settles the nervous system and, when repeated, becomes a new way of being. This is especially true with a sleep routine. Making time to unwind a non-negotiable part of your day is an excellent pathway to a healthy work-life balance.

If you don't have a bedtime routine, make one! A few late nights here and there is okay, but if you can stick to a realistic routine most of the time you'll benefit from less stress and improved sleep. Some practices that may ease the transition between busy day and peaceful night include:

- Staying away from technology 90 minutes before bed.
- Dimming the lights or lighting candles an hour before sleep.

- Spraying Sleep Mist on your pillow.
- Playing relaxing music.
- Gently stretching or doing a Calm session.

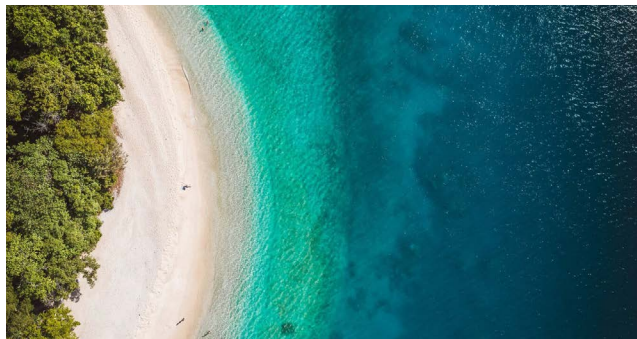
Experiment and find what works best for you.

Here are a few tools to bring more meaning into your daily routines:



### [On the Blog: How to Bring Meaningful Rituals into Your Daily Life](#)

We don't need to fill our schedules to feel fulfilled. Instead, we can benefit from introducing small rituals into our daily lives or simply reimagining what we already do.



### [On the Blog: 9 Tips for Setting Healthy Boundaries](#)

Honoring our limits helps us take better care of ourselves, builds trust, prevents burnout, and infuses more meaning and authenticity into our relationships.



### [On the Blog: Listen Deeply to Music and It Becomes Your Meditation](#)

When we consciously choose to focus on listening to music, we prevent our minds from being hijacked by thoughts, feelings, or ideas. It's like a reset button for our body, mind, and heart.

#### **CALM TIP**

Smell, sensation, and sight create powerful behavioral cues so pay attention to what your senses find soothing when designing your bedtime routine.

# Train your mind

Strong arms don't materialize after a single bicep curl. Mental strength is just the same. Focusing on our mental fitness can help us soften stress and cultivate greater courage, confidence, composure, clarity, and creativity. Your mind is a muscle – together, let's flex it.

Here are three ways to boost your mental fitness:

## [Train Your Mind](#)

- Three-time champion LeBron James opens up his playbook on mental fitness for the very first time.

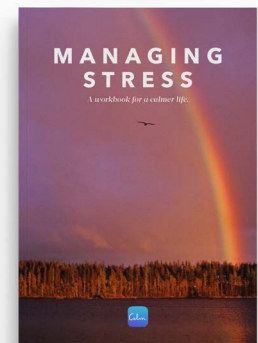
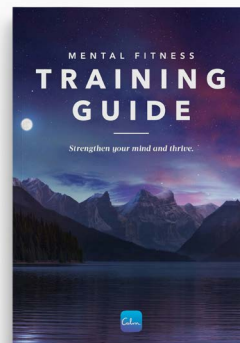


## [Mental Fitness Training Guide](#)

- Neuroplasticity means that, at any age, through training, we can mold our brains to become even more mentally strong, healthy, and fit.

## [Managing Stress Workbook](#)

- Our bodies are designed for stress (but, not too much). Use this workbook to explore new ways to counterbalance and decrease the effects of stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system.



# Make or break a habit

Cultivating a new habit or letting go of one that no longer serves us can create closer alignment between what we want and how we live. What have you been meaning to stop or start doing? What is something that doesn't feel impossible to do, but that would make a big difference in your life? Mindfulness is a powerful and compassionate way to approach habit change.

Here are three tools to help you make sustainable shifts in your life:

## [Breaking Habits](#)

- A collection of meditations to help break habits that no longer serve you.

## [Breaking Bad Habits](#)

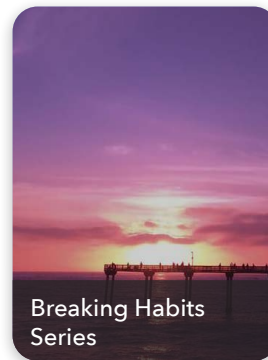
- Psychiatrist and addiction expert Dr. Judson Brewer outlines proven techniques for overcoming bad habits in this Calm Masterclass.

## [How to Change Habits Mindfully](#)

- A step-by-step guidebook to inspire new possibilities and make important changes in your life.

“Just don't give up trying to do what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don't think you can go wrong.”

– Ella Fitzgerald

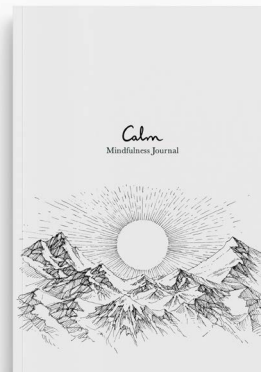




## Weave mindfulness into your daily life

The [Daily Calm Calendar](#) encourages you to meet life with presence and curiosity. Our daily mindfulness invitations are like tiny experiments that'll help you learn more about yourself and the world. These insights can nourish and support you as you breathe through life's ups, downs, twists, and twirls.

Writing is a powerful way to slow down, check in with yourself, and deepen your mindfulness practice. That's why we created the [Calm Mindfulness Journal](#), a 7-day journal for you to download and print. We hope this practice of presence, contemplation and reflection will serve to expand your awareness, inspire insight and empower your choices. Give yourself 10 minutes every day and write. Try it out and discover the wisdom that lives within.





“The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”

– Carl Rogers

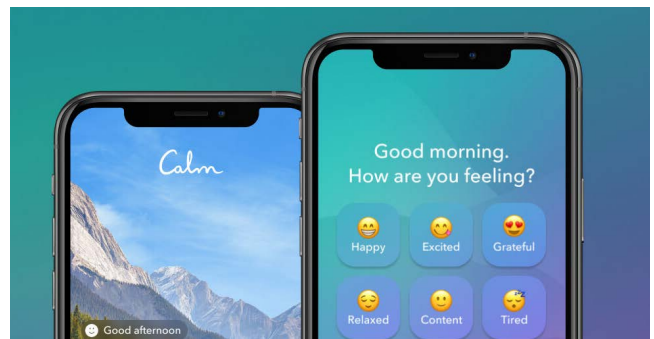


## Track your mood

Regularly tracking your emotional rhythms is a powerful way to take care of your mental health. Taking time daily to note how you're feeling can help you:

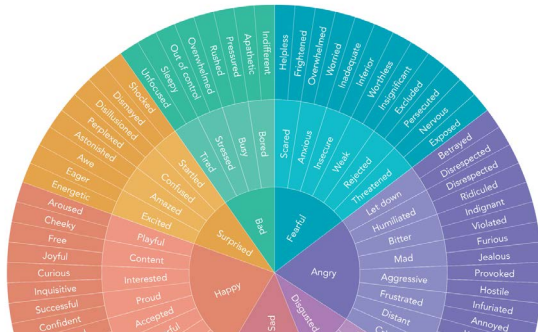
- Create space to feel your feelings
- Get insight into what you need and how to best take care of yourself
- Recognize patterns and triggers
- Communicate clearly to others
- Get the support you need

Get started today with these three resources:



### [On the Blog: How are you feeling? A 31 Day Challenge](#)

Record how you're feeling with Calm's mood tracker. It's a daily check-in that helps you build awareness of the ebb and flow of your feelings.



[On the Blog: The Feelings Wheel](#)

Scan the wheel to discover what adjective best describes your state and let that understanding empower you in the moment.

[On the Blog: 5 Benefits of Tracking your Mood](#)

Feelings influence our thoughts and behavior, so it's important to tune in and appropriately attend to your emotional wellbeing.

**CALM TIP**

If you're struggling to manage your emotions or feeling stuck in despair or anger, you may want to seek out the help of a therapist, doctor, or counselor.

# Practice gratitude

Feeling stressed out often reveals a lack of space. If you take a moment to pause when you're experiencing stress, you may notice that the body, mind and heart are contracting in an effort to push you through the day. The problem is that we typically resist stopping because it can be hard to know how to manage the discomfort. That's where gratitude comes in.

Gratitude creates space. It's the sweet feeling of thankfulness that comes when we appreciate an experience, a person, or a thing. While it can arise spontaneously in the moment, it's also a feeling that can be cultivated with a gratitude practice.

People who practice gratitude consistently feel more generous, compassionate, and connected to others. Ultimately, gratitude is one of the great keys to unlocking happiness.

Here are three ways to make gratitude a practice:

## Gratitude Masterclass

- Unlock the transformative power of gratitude. This uplifting Calm Masterclass offers tools, insights, and inspiration to develop this life-changing practice.

## Gratitude Toolkit

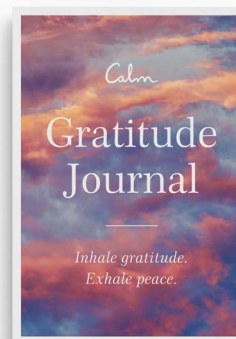
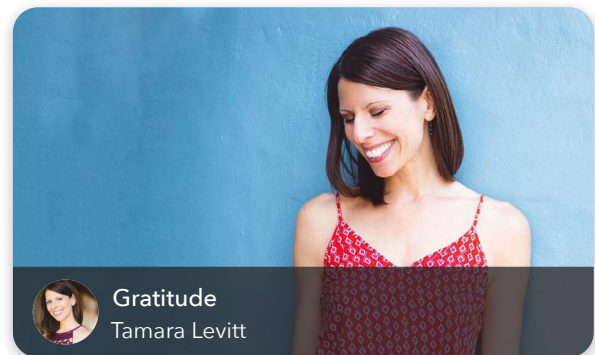
- A toolkit of helpful exercises and practices to support you in forging a daily habit of expressing and feeling gratefulness.

## Daily Gratitude Journal

- Gratitude wakes us up to the beauty and magic of everyday life, but we have to choose it. Use this 30-day journal to reflect on what inspires gratitude within you.

“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough.”

– Melody Beattie



# Befriend yourself

Of course, it's natural to seek self-improvement. But it will never bring us fulfillment if rooted in a belief that we're fundamentally defective as a person.

Our flaws make us human and whole. Our unconventional views, unusual habits, and quirky patterns are all key ingredients in the recipe of who we are. If we can practice quieting that judgemental inner voice, replacing it with compassion and kindness, we may learn to love ourselves, just as we are.

Here are three ways to soften your inner critic and become a better friend to yourself:

## Radical Self-Compassion

- Our inner critic can hijack our ability to connect with others, express ourselves, and experience joy. But, it doesn't have to be this way. Try the practice of radical compassion instead.

## Relationship with Self

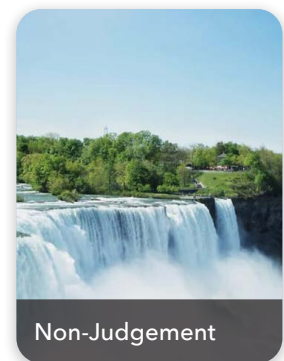
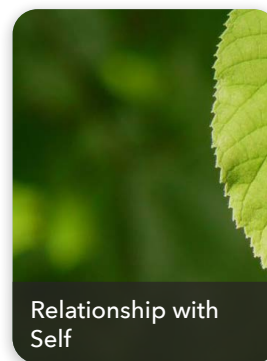
- A series of meditations to strengthen your relationship with yourself through trust, insight, and compassion.

## Non-Judgement

- Recognizing our judgmental tendencies is the first step towards softening them. Return to this meditation again and again.

"Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we'll ever do."

– Brené Brown



### **CALM TIP**

Watch this [video](#) if you're feeling hard on yourself today.

“If you want to fly, you have to give up  
what weighs you down.”

– Roy T. Bennett



## Let it go

It's almost impossible to go through life without being irritated or triggered by others. And it's all too easy to fall into a narrative that “they're wrong, and I'm right”. Regardless of right or wrong, these interactions and thought patterns impact both mind and body. We may experience tension in the jaw, and muscle tightness in the neck, shoulders, and upper back.

One way to positively reframe this experience is to recognize that everyone is doing their best. Even if it's not obvious, we're all confronting our own challenges. Perhaps the parent who was late picking up their kid had an argument with their partner, or recently received some unfortunate medical results. Maybe the colleague who forgot to thank you is feeling anxious about something they have to share with a loved one at dinner, or they're going through financial difficulties.

When we remind ourselves of the complexity of life, we begin to soften, and forgiveness becomes possible. Imagine what kind of world we could co-create if we all tapped into kindness and compassion more often.

Here are some meditations to encourage us to make the world a kinder place:

### Relationship with Others

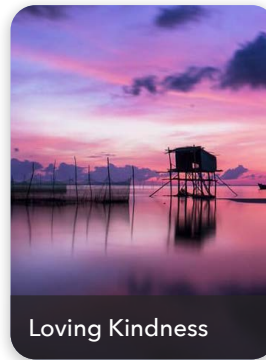
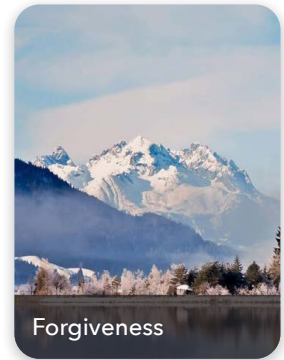
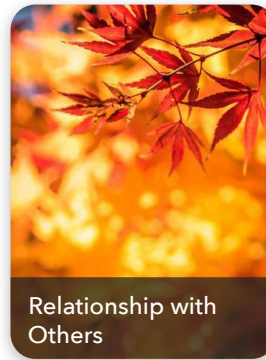
- Meditations to cultivate healthier and happier connections (even during times of conflict).

### Forgiveness

- A meditation to release resentment and invite greater peace into your heart.

### Loving Kindness

- A meditation to develop warmth, compassion and love towards yourself and others.



#### **CALM TIP**

Inhale to acknowledge your irritation.  
Exhale to let it go.

# Do a digital detox

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to lose precious time on digital devices? Checking, liking, heart-ing, and commenting on social media, reading the next suggested article or watching just one more show; before we know it, minutes roll into hours. Whatever your digital kryptonite – online shopping, social media, video games, Netflix – it’s all too easy to get hooked.

While there’s nothing inherently wrong with using social media or watching screens, trouble arises when these habits start taking more from us than they give. Often, what we need the most is a break from our devices. In this day and age, that’s a real challenge, which makes it especially important to take a timeout whenever possible. Explore what’s manageable for you. Maybe an hour free from technology before bed or upon waking, or a day away every month?

Here are three Masterclasses that can help you learn how to maximize and enrich your time away from work:

## [Social Media & Screen Addiction](#)

- Screens and social media are incredibly addictive... but why? And what can we actually do about it?

## [The Power of Rest](#)

- In a society that encourages overwork, science now shows us that we can all work better, be more productive, and have happier lives if we learn how to balance work with rest.

## [Creative Living Beyond Fear](#)

- Learn to reach beyond fear and tap into your creative potential, as Elizabeth Gilbert, the beloved bestselling author of *Eat Pray Love*, shares the exact strategy she uses to overcome fear, as well as the profound secrets behind her creative success.



### **CALM TIP**

When you’re looking to take an intentional break from the digital world, try charging your phone in another room in airplane mode or putting it in a box for an hour during the day.

“In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they’re still beautiful.”

– Alice Walker



## Go Out

Take a deep breath of fresh air. Smell the scent of the trees. Feel the sun on your face. One of the most powerful ways to de-stress is to spend time outdoors. Fluorescent lights and interacting with students all day can be exhausting, so give yourself a break amongst the restorative effects of nature. If it’s cold, throw on some layers and go for a hike. If it’s hot, find a natural body of water and go swimming. Notice how spending a little time in nature makes you feel.

Try this walking meditation to help you fully receive the world around you:

### [Mindful Walking](#)

- A guided meditation for walking mindfully.

