LIVING MINDFULLY ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

An Intergenerational Guide

J. Kim Penberthy and J. Morgan Penberthy

ROUTLEDGE

‘Too often “self-help” books are not interesting and enjoyable to read. This guide by Kim and Morgan Penberthy is just the opposite! Of greater importance, the context and examples are extremely relevant and useful; the advice comes straight from science – not their armchair opinions. This is a must read for people of *all* ages – it can change your life!’

– **Arthur M. Nezu, Ph.D., DHL, ABPP**,
distinguished university Professor of Psychology,
and **Christine Maguth Nezu, Ph.D., ABPP**,
Professor of Psychology, both at Drexel University

‘It would be amazing if this mother–daughter handbook for navigating life was assigned to everyone, kind of like a driver’s license or a mammogram. From adolescence to middle age, I can imagine people everywhere savoring each chapter of this book in planes, in cozy armchairs, in amazing intergenerational book clubs – and what healing and empowerment will ripple out from those who do. It’s full of wisdom, straight talk, and tools you can use today to create a more compassionate and thriving life – inside and out.’

– **Cassandra Vieten, Ph.D.**, psychologist, senior fellow,
Institute of Noetic Sciences; executive director,
John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation

‘An insightful and wise guide to mindfully navigating every season of life with clarity, compassion and grace. This book has an ambitious scope, and delivers!’

– **Tara Brach**, author of *Radical Acceptance*
and Radical Compassion

‘Kim and Morgan Penberthy have written this helpful guide for skillfully navigating the ups and downs of life. Grounded in their rich professional experiences and personal journeys toward wholeness, they offer practical and evidence-based approaches to living authentically and with peace of mind. So unique and refreshing to have intergenerational perspectives of both mother and daughter woven together!’

– **Susan Bauer-Wu, Ph.D., RN**, author of *Leaves Falling Gently* and
president of the Mind & Life Institute

‘This mother and daughter duo have tapped into their rich personal and professional experiences to help those seeking to achieve more fulfilling and meaningful lives. The book is entertaining to read and filled with enlightening personal stories, real life examples, cutting-edge research, and practical exercises. Kudos to the authors for writing such an approachable guide to becoming more mindful, self-compassionate, and self-efficacious at any age.'

– **Brandon A. Gaudiano, Ph.D.**, Professor of Psychiatry
in the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University
and primary faculty in the Brown Mindfulness Center

'Kim and Morgan Penberthy have written a helpful and accessible book, loaded with practical suggestions for living a better life. They draw on the most recent and most research-based interventions within positive psychology to provide a roadmap for understanding major transitions over the lifespan. This is an excellent read, and virtually everyone who navigates its pages will benefit greatly.'

– **Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Ph.D.**, commonwealth
Professor emeritus since his retirement from
Virginia Commonwealth University

Living Mindfully Across the Lifespan

Living Mindfully Across the Lifespan: An Intergenerational Guide provides user-friendly, empirically supported information about and answers to some of the most frequently encountered questions and dilemmas of human living, interactions, and emotions.

With a mix of empirical data, humor, and personal insight, each chapter introduces the reader to a significant topic or question, including self-worth, anxiety, depression, relationships, personal development, loss, and death. Along with exercises that clients and therapists can use in daily practice, chapters feature personal stories and case studies, interwoven throughout with the authors' unique intergenerational perspectives. Compassionate, engaging writing is balanced with a straightforward presentation of research data and practical strategies to help address issues via psychological, behavioral, contemplative, and movement-oriented exercises.

Readers will learn how to look deeply at themselves and society, and to apply what has been learned over decades of research and clinical experience to enrich their lives and the lives of others.

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Living Mindfully Across the Lifespan

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**This book is dedicated to family and friends,
past, present, and future, with love and gratitude!
Remember to live, laugh, and love! – Kim Penberthy**

This book is dedicated to everyone who is ready to show up for themselves and their communities to cultivate the internal awareness and take the actions that will ultimately make our world a better place. – Morgan Penberthy

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Preface

Why We Wrote This Book and How to Use It

We're often asked, 'So, what's your book about?' and 'Why did you even write this to begin with?' In this book, we write about our own experiences as well as the experiences of those with whom we have worked over the years – Kim as a Board Certified Licensed Clinical Psychologist and endowed Professor at the University of Virginia School of Medicine and Morgan as a well-being coach/yoga and meditation instructor. Please know that the stories shared are based on composites of real cases, but modified to protect identities and confidentiality, thus, we will NOT use real names, except for our own. Many of the people we work with face certain events that negatively impact their lives in one way or another. They come to us for help to move forward. This book is an effort to take much of the work we have done with individuals or smaller groups and share it with a larger audience in order to help more people! We share our experiences and perspectives based on the research literature as well as our clinical practices. We wanted to write a book that is informed by science and cultural awareness, yet still have it be applicable, accessible, and helpful in everyday life.

In the following pages, you'll notice that our 12 chapters are designed to span the development of humans. The first three chapters focus on areas that are often first associated in our early development and youth, the next six chapters on early and late middle life topics, and the last three on the advanced stages of our lives and associated topics. Again, this is a loose organization and we are certainly aware that the concepts addressed can be of concern during multiple or all phases of our lives. You will also notice that the individual chapters are formatted into three main sections: 1) an introduction to the topic area with a story and information representative of questions or dilemmas associated with the topic; 2) an overview of information about the content area from the research literature and social sciences; and 3) practical and effective contextual, cognitive, behavioral, and/or movement-based strategies and exercises to use to help address the issue. These strategies may include promoting and practicing a new or different way of thinking about an issue, providing new information from science or research, suggesting behavioral or interpersonal strategies to try yourself and/or with others, as well as mindful-movement-based exercises to use. The information presented here is what has worked for us, for other people, and potentially for you. Each strategy we provide you in this book is tied to the content area by the literature and the rationale for each is provided. Feel free to skip pages to specifically find a situation that best represents your own if you want to start learning and working on that one problem right away. If you're interested in understanding how these issues can differ and be impacted throughout a lifespan, just read continuously until you've read each chapter consecutively. Or start with the last chapter – this is *your* experience. *Anything* works – this is your time to learn and grow through our evidence-based research-sharing and storytelling, and with a couple of laughs, we hope that this book helps you to connect to yourself and live a more meaningful, deeply enriched life – the life you deserve.

A Word about the Movement Exercises and Yoga

This book is meant for you. The practices and methods within this book are here for you, for your parents, your children, your siblings, your friends and co-workers, and complete strangers. Suffice it to say, this book and its contents have been lovingly compiled, researched, and practiced in an effort to provide those who read it with the tools to cope with the ebbs and flows of being and to enrich their lives. This book is meant to act as a resource for anybody who wishes to explore a more effective way of being, or who feels the need to answer deep questions, to understand how to mindfully navigate life's transitions, and to ultimately cultivate personal, professional, and/or spiritual growth. In this book, we introduce you to psychological, contemplative, and interpersonal constructs and how to apply these concepts to improve your own life and the lives of others. It's important that before we begin our discussion of some of our most commonly asked life questions, we discuss and learn to understand some powerful practices referred to in this book including yoga, meditation, and mindfulness.

When people think of yoga, images of light, airy yoga studios, or physically fit instructors in impossible positions may come to mind. The hypothetical instructors or students may look a specific way or fit a certain mold – and, given the type of images often portrayed on the cover of yoga and meditation-based magazines, books, and other publications, some of us may believe that the contemplative practices are only for certain people with specific physical abilities or who are from certain social or cultural backgrounds. The truth is that *none* of that is true of these practices. These practices are for *everyone* and *anyone* who wants to practice it and learn about it! There are no prerequisites to practicing yoga – no matter your physical ability, spiritual inclination, or cultural background. Yoga is for everyone – and *every body*, as yoga teacher and advocate Jessamyn Stanley puts it – and there is no right or wrong way to begin your yoga practice (Stanley, 2017). Whether simply folding forward toward your toes or reading a sutra for the first time, your journey with yoga and meditation is fully yours to own, meld and create as your practice.

Speaking of meditation, you may be wondering what exactly that is and how it relates to yoga. Interestingly, yoga is understood as a precursor to meditation! Essentially, yoga works to 'get the wiggles out,' so to speak, to prepare the body for meditation. Some of the exercises we will be utilizing in this book focus on mindfulness, which is defined by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn as 'awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally' (Kabat-Zinn, 2012, p. 1). One of the primary ways in which we're able to cultivate this nonjudgmental, intentional awareness of the present moment is through focusing on the breath – or the lifeforce, *prana*, as illustrated in yogic theory. Breath is what separates the living from the nonliving, and it's an action that all of us do all of the time – from the moment we were born! Unfortunately, many of us lose touch with just how precious and important the breath is because we're able to breathe with ease and may not necessarily need to focus on our breathing to be able to sustain our minds and bodies. The act of meditation and of mindfulness is to bring our awareness gently and intentionally to the breath in an act of quiet self-reflection and self-care. Our breath is sacred and is what allows us to live. Connecting with our breath allows us to connect with our higher selves in a profound way. Breath is universal – and, as Desikachar says, 'Anybody who wants to can practice yoga. Anybody can breathe; therefore anybody can practice yoga' (and meditation, for that matter!) (Desikachar, 1995, p. xxvii). Please do check with your healthcare providers if you are at all concerned about doing some of the exercises or if you have any conditions that may affect your practice. With this in mind, we invite you to participate in our exercises while remembering to honor your own body and mind.

Please know that these practices are here for you – you have the choice to use these tools in whatever way speaks to *you*. This journey is yours. Enjoy!

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1 You Have Worth Just for Existing

The Concept of Self-Worth

Some of us go about our lives without much need to justify our worth. There are those among us, however, who spend more of our time agonizing and feeling unworthy and undeserving. More than 5% of Americans endorsed feelings of worthlessness or low self-esteem when asked about this in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) (Blackwell et al., 2012). There are approximately 327.2 million Americans in 2018 according to the U.S. Census Bureau's population clock, and if we assume the same rate of worthlessness (which may be a conservative estimate), that would mean we have over 16 million people in the U.S. today suffering from feelings of worthlessness. The same NHIS showed that being divorced or separated increases the odds of feeling worthless to 8.7%, and the numbers for those Americans who do not have a high school education are even higher, coming in at a whopping 19%! A survey by Aaron Beck, M.D., a famous researcher who studies the treatment of depression with psychotherapy called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), showed that over 80% of depressed people endorse dislike for themselves. There are also those of us who generally feel okay about ourselves, but have periods of time during our life when our self-worth is in doubt or flat-out in the gutter. I would wager this has happened to more than a few of us – including folks who may generally be successful, high achieving, and seem, at least from the 'outside,' to have no reason to doubt their worth.

We propose a concept that all sentient creatures have worth just by the nature of the fact that they exist. In this chapter, we also present the concept that this powerful truth can be learned and cultivated. We explore some mindful strategies, including compassion meditations, to help increase self-worth. Taken literally, gaining this knowledge and truly owning it can be an amazingly positive and profound insight for people, and can even save lives. We'll begin this chapter and this book with true stories about owning our worth.

Kim's Story of Self-Worth

I grew up in the 1970s and 80s in an upper-middle class family, the eldest of three children. I was a naturally happy, energetic child, who was independent and carefree. I grew into an upbeat, energetic adolescent who was somewhat of a people pleaser. I had a lovely childhood as the daughter of a surgeon and a nurse. My mother, the nurse, stopped working outside the home when my little brother was born in 1971. There was no alcohol or drug abuse, no violence, and my life was good – I had everything I needed – friends, safety, opportunity. My mother was loving, accepting, and as the daughter of an alcoholic herself, she had worked hard to provide a safe and supportive home. I felt it. I felt something different, however, from my father, who was more stoic and harder to read. Like many fathers of the time, I have come to learn, he did not say 'I love you' and rarely gave hugs. He was a good provider, he was quiet, never physically or emotionally abusive. But, I couldn't get a read on him, and I couldn't shake the feeling that what I was doing was not good enough. Most of the time, I couldn't even get his attention, it felt. I was good in school – top of my class, attractive, popular, and tried to be a good person. I had been accepted into my number one choice for college, but felt like I couldn't even get my father's attention, let alone his approval. Over the years of talking with friends and acquaintances, I have heard many report similar experiences.

Many of us had parents, especially fathers, born in the late 1930s–40s who grew up in the 1940s–50s – the baby boomer generation – and many of us felt their particular style of parenting. My mother ran the household and raised the children, even though she had an advanced nursing degree and had worked professionally before and early into her marriage. My father worked hard and earned the money. He was not the emotionally supportive parent that my mother was. He was not the one to be overly effusive or even particularly obviously supportive. Why am I telling you all of this? One reason is that if you were raised by baby boomers, if you are a 'GenXer,' then you may be able to relate. The second reason is that I think this background is important in understanding my relationship with self-worth. I grew up strong and competent but was also trying to please. My self-worth became tied, at least in some areas of life, to my performance and accomplishments. I felt a strong desire to please and succeed in the eyes of authoritative others. If someone did not notice my success, I tried harder to succeed, achieve, accomplish … and I was most often successful … very successful. This state of affairs led to many accomplishments, but even as a young adult, it didn't feel like I had impressed my father enough for him to say that he loved me or was proud of me.

Morgan's Story of Self-Worth

I am a millennial and an only child. I grew up with incredibly supportive parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family, and friends. Growing up, I was told over and over that I am a being of worth. I was (and still am) reminded on a daily basis how loved, supported, and cared for I am by those who love, support, and care about me. I was (and still am) told that the world is better with me in it. And I am continually thankful to have grown up with these beautiful reminders from those who love me and whom I love dearly. The teenage me believed these things as well. I knew that I was loved and supported, and that expectations were high for me because those who expected great things of me were confident I could accomplish them – and I, of course, expected the most out of myself.

And even with all of this love and support, I took my own expectations the most seriously. I experienced major doubt. I sometimes wondered if I'd be deemed a 'failure' if I got a B on a paper, or if I would lose my worth by being the loser whose parents picked them up from a party. In my early teenage years, I was stuck in this place where I sometimes listened to my parents' advice about things like academics and extracurricular involvement, but sternly refused to hear anything they had to say about my romantic relationships or social experiences. I didn't know who to listen to in order to navigate my teenage-hood and create the life I wanted. I look back now and realize my self-worth was low even though I could not recognize it. I would feel sad and not worthy for no reason and wondered if this was just me. Looking back, I realize how hard I was on myself and how so much of it stemmed from not feeling worthy.

The History of Self-Worth

Many of the religions and spiritual traditions of the world teach that humans have worth just for existing. For example, the Abrahamic religions typically teach that all people are made in the image of God. Accordingly, the value of human life is intrinsic, for it derives from God, who made human beings in his own image (*Genesis 1:26–27*; American Bible Society, 2002). This core belief is central to Christian, Judaic, and Islamic teachings, which express that there is value to be found in all people, no matter their appearance or social status. All religions recognize human beings as fundamentally equal, whether this is understood as a consequence of their status as children of God, such as in Christianity, Judaism, or Islam: *'So God created humanity in God's image, in the image of God, God created them'* (*Genesis 1:27*; American Bible Society, 2002), of their manifestation of the Divine in Hinduism: *'The human body is the temple of God'* (*Rig Veda*; Hooven, 1933), or of their common original nature and desire for happiness as in Buddhism: *'All sentient beings without* *exception have the Buddha-nature'* (*Nirvana Sutra*; Blum, 2013). Respect for human dignity is, therefore, a fundamental principle of spiritual traditions. With that equality comes a belief that all humans deserve a basic level of respect and dignity, regardless of their background.

Another way of saying this is 'humans – all humans – have worth just for existing!'

Imagine if you and others could truly and thoroughly fathom this as a fact. You have worth. This is the *absolute truth*. Whether you were taught this or not, what would it be like to believe it? You have worth just for existing. Imagine: if that is true, what does it mean for you?

For some rare few, this knowledge alone may work to help realize your inherent worth. But those of you who can simply 'read and believe' are few and far between. So, this means that most of you, if you are suffering from low self-worth or worthless feelings, will need more.

We are certainly not the only people who have ever dealt with feelings of low self-worth, self-doubt, or lack of self-acceptance. It seems like nearly all humans who have been around long enough to feel emotions and interact with other humans have experienced these feelings. The ways these feelings manifest and are approached vary widely based on a multitude of factors, probably because each individual is raised by unique individuals, in unique circumstances, and in unique places and times. Everyone learns about themselves, others, and the world in a similar way, but we all learn a bit of a different story – even siblings or family members who grew up in the same home at the same time! Although those who feel worthless share many commonalities, their individual experiences are unique to their own learning history and circumstances.

Challenges to Self-Worth

Throughout life we encounter multiple challenges to our own self-worth, including challenges from others and ourselves. Feelings of worthlessness are hypothesized to be a learned emotion and can also be an associated symptom of other devastating disorders, such as depression. Low self-worth is unfortunately often 'taught' to us by the very people who are around us from birth and who are tasked to care for and nurture us. Families act as an incubator for learned responses to life, both positive and negative. Messages can be blatant or subtle, but they are often well-learned.

We, as Morgan's parents, thought we were providing Morgan with loving and positive messages, and we were. Yet, our verbal messages were not all that she was listening to. She was listening to our disapproving body language and facial expressions when she told us that she had not started her homework yet or that she got a 'C' on a quiz. She was listening to the messages on social media about all of her friends' and classmates' amazing achievements, great test scores, exciting weekend trips, wonderful boyfriend, etc. And she was listening to her own internal messages that she was not good enough. Even the most positive intentions of loving family and friends may fail, especially in the face of incessant challenging messages from other sources. Imagine the destructive impact of blatant messages of worthlessness and irrelevance or worse yet, open contempt or hatred! Unfortunately, there is no shortage of folks that I have spoken to who had these horrifying experiences growing up.

One example of such a situation was a patient of mine whom we will call Ruth. Ruth was a quiet, sad 62-year-old office worker who started seeing me for persistent depression when she could no longer function because of it. Her symptoms included feelings of worthlessness. In getting to know her over our time together in therapy, she hesitantly told me stories of her childhood and how her mother made it very clear to her from an early age that she was not worthy. Her mother shared that she resented Ruth, and never wanted to have a baby, and that she did not think much of her once she was born. Ruth's father was resentful of another mouth to feed, and let both Ruth and her mother know that he did not think he owed Ruth anything. Ruth was blamed for all the family financial troubles, and from an early age, reported feelings of worthlessness and shame. Ruth had no concept that she had worth because the primary people in her life told her, in no uncertain terms, that she DID NOT have worth.

Ruth suffered from low self-worth, to be sure, and she learned this from the people in her life. Due to the extreme nature of her conditioning, her symptoms manifested into a serious mental disorder, and she was diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder, among other things. We know that clinical depression and persistent depression (sometimes called dysthymia) are associated with feelings of worthlessness, as well as other significant negative emotions such as sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, tearfulness, anxiety, and other physical symptoms, like pain, insomnia, appetite changes, and fatigue. We also know that the causes of such depressive disorders are multifactorial, meaning that they are typically caused by genetics and environment, including the things we learn from those around us. While positive responses from others support our emotional equilibrium, negative responses can bog us down, making it difficult to remain afloat under the tide of life. Humans are very good learners and we do not discriminate between learning from healthy, well-intended individuals and hateful, malignant ones!

Another example is a friend of mine, Tad, who generally had a pleasant, what some would call 'normal' childhood with no trauma or abuse. When I met him as a young adult, he had a pleasant demeanor and happy outlook. He suffered from low self-worth after his divorce and the financial hardship that followed. He was a young father who had been easygoing and funny, but began doubting his worth. After his wife cheated on him and then ultimately left him for her lover, he became withdrawn and reported that he felt worthless. He felt even worse after dealing with all the legal issues surrounding the divorce and finally sought help from a therapist when he started doubting that he could be a good father to his two young boys.

These examples can be viewed along a continuum. Low self-worth can occur to those with good upbringing who have healthy habits and supportive people in their lives. Self-loathing can also have more extreme manifestations due to impoverished or abusive conditions and can ultimately become associated with further disease and disability in the form of trauma-related depression, anxiety, and other psychological and physical symptoms. There are many areas in between as well, and of course, self-worth and self-esteem can be impacted in the moment by internal experiences and external events, respectively.

Depression, anxiety, and other mental conditions often happen to people who have low self-worth. At this point, it is not clear whether it's the mental condition and the stigma associated with it that causes the low self-worth or whether it happens the other way around. Either way, they build on each other, creating a persistent feeling of unworthiness and despair. People who don't value themselves may also tend to get into unhealthy relationships, and this can compound the challenges to their own worth.

Your Own Self-Worth

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines self-worth as 'a feeling that you are a good person who deserves to be treated with respect.' There are many ways for someone to value themselves and assess their worth as a human being, and some of these ways are more psychologically beneficial than others. Christina Hibbert, Ph.D., who is a clinical psychologist studying self-worth and self-esteem, proposes that 'Self-esteem is what we think and feel and believe about ourselves. Self-worth is recognizing "I am greater than all of those things." It is a deep knowing that I am of value, that I am lovable, necessary to this life, and of incomprehensible worth' (Hibbert, 2013). Self-worth can be thought of as a trait, which means something that you are born with, or as a state, which means it can be influenced and changed over time. In reality, self-worth is probably influenced by multiple factors, and can be thought of as impacted by biology, and psychological and social factors and thus, can also be changed through learning. This would imply then that some people are naturally more confident in their self-worth and some may be less confident. It also means that self-worth can be modified and increased with intention and effort.

Self-Worth Versus Self-Esteem or Self-Efficacy

In the psychological world, self-worth and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, although they are not exactly the same. Self-worth can be defined as the value that an individual gives to herself, specifically the value that an individual gives to herself internally, regardless of what is happening in the external world. Self-esteem refers to the appreciation that an individual has for herself. Having self-esteem is important as it allows you to appreciate your own talents and capabilities. It can also lead to comparing yourself to others. Thus, self-esteem can be said to depend on external factors, rather than internal factors. We will discuss self-esteem and its relationship to self-efficacy in Chapter 3, but suffice it to say that self-esteem is impacted by others, and self-worth is not. In other words, self-worth is about who you are, not about what you do.

Your Story of Self-Worth

A good place to start your own work is to think hard about your own internal messages as well as the responses to life that you learned while growing up. What did you learn that may be hindering you now? What is helpful to you? The first step of this kind of assessment is to explore your own feelings and experiences and be really honest with yourself. We advocate doing an exercise where you examine your own 'rules' or 'maps' that you picked up during your childhood and youth. These are like the 'sound track' of your youth – the things you learned that you may not even remember learning. These may be rules that you are aware of or less aware of. They are probably assumptions that you have been carrying around with you unchecked ever since! You can write these things down or just talk them through in your own head or with a trusted other, such as a therapist or a close friend. Ask yourself: 'What did I learn about myself, others, and life in general, growing up?' These can be responses you've acknowledged, or those you observed but never really said out loud. You may want to try a journaling activity by finishing the following statements:

- The good things my family taught me about myself…
- The negative things my family taught me about myself…
- The good things my family taught me about others…
- The negative things my family taught me about others…
- The good things my family taught me about life…
- The negative things my family taught me about life…

Some positive examples of learning include: 'I learned that I am strong.' or 'I learned that other people can be supportive and helpful.' or 'I learned that life is good.' Some common negative examples I have heard in clinical practice include: 'I learned that what I do doesn't matter.' or 'I learned that other people will let me down.' or 'I learned that life is scary and uncertain.'

Often the most negative responses to life are those unspoken truths of your family. We might think of these as family secrets or unspoken rules. They inform your 'maps' or view of things. Doing the above exercise may help you identify some of your negative maps about self-worth, and it may also help you discover other rules that you assumed were true, that may not be. For example, your family may have taught you that your worth is conditional upon performance – do well and you are worthy; fail and you are worthless. This is a common lesson in families and is guaranteed to set you up for feeling low self-worth at least some of the time. This is because nobody can succeed all the time. As we have already established, we are operating under the new assumption that worth is not conditional, but exists simply because you do.

You can also dig a little deeper and think about the specifics of what you may have learned about yourself and others by asking yourself these additional questions:

- What happened when I asked for help or needed others?
- When I messed up or failed?
- When I displayed negative emotions?
- When I disclosed or became vulnerable?
- Were these things even an option?

Often the experiences we had in these circumstances are what help shape and cement our 'rules' for better or worse. Understanding that these are learned assumptions and not hard and fast truths can be very freeing and help us liberate ourselves from old learning and old 'soundtracks.'

Once you have a better understanding of where and how your own soundtrack came about, and maybe even what is currently maintaining it, you can get to work on improving it – grounding it more in the reality of today, instead of the past! You can begin to challenge the old maps and rules that are echoing in your mind and replace them with updated self-statements of encouragement and kindness toward yourself.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been quoted as saying, 'If you don't love yourself, you cannot love others. You will not be able to love others. If you have no compassion for yourself then you are not capable of developing compassion for others' (Chola, 2019).

Benefits of Self-Worth

Positive self-worth is associated with lots of good things in life and seems to shield us from many types of mental illness and emotional problems. Specifically, emerging research indicates that self-compassion has powerful positive effects on our mental and physical health. Social scientists like Drs. Barbara Fredrickson, Sonja Lyubomirsky, and Kristin Neff have documented how compassion and the positive emotions associated with it, such as gratitude, increase our ability to notice more possibilities, feel happier, take another person's perspective, perform better on cognitive tasks, and even decrease the susceptibility to physical illness like heart disease and cancer (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Neff & Costigan, 2014). When we gain the capacity for self-compassion it is often via mindfulness and may make it easier to be compassionate to others (Penberthy et al., 2016).

However, research shows that basing your self-worth only on external factors can be harmful to your mental health. In fact, a study by Dr. Jennifer Crocker, a psychologist who studies self-worth and self-esteem, showed that college students who based their self-worth on external sources (things like grades, physical appearance or looks) reported increased stress, anger, academic problems, and relationship conflicts. They also had higher levels of alcohol and drug use, and more symptoms of eating disorders. The same study found that students who based their self-worth on internal sources (like being a good person), not only felt better, they also received higher grades and were less likely to use drugs and alcohol or to develop eating disorders (Crocker, 2002). Thus, self-worth may be most effectively cultivated via mindful awareness of internal values and sources and compassion toward the self. This may be the best thing about positive self-worth – it can be cultivated! It is clear that it takes effort and intention, but with the right tools and motivation, you can increase your own feelings of self-worth and the benefits it entails!

How to Build Self-Worth

Knowing your own rules or soundtrack from your own history is the first step to helping (re)build your self-worth. Recognizing that these are learned assumptions and not reality is another powerful step toward gaining self-worth. This knowledge helps you to stop automatically buying into the negative rules or beliefs and begin to explore these assumptions in a gentle, curious manner. This is actually a very mindful act in that you are being with yourself in the moment and suspending automatic judgment.

This allows you to recognize that the voice in your head that says 'you don't deserve good things,' 'you are not good enough' is just an old voice from the past, which is not true and never was. This knowledge is extremely powerful and can help you pause long enough to stay in the moment, catch your breath, and then move into even more powerful activities to help improve your self-worth. You may be a product of your past, but you do not need to continue to be negatively impacted by it in the present. Once you realize this, you can pause, be in the moment without judgment, and with clarity, focus on allowing yourself to be compassionate and kind to yourself. Self-compassion has been demonstrated to be an effective front-line strategy to improve self-worth (Neff, 2011; Neff & Costigan, 2014).

Strategies to Increase Self-Worth and Self-Esteem

As you might guess, the good news is that there are effective strategies to help people assess and challenge even severe feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem. There are essentially two overarching components that have been shown to be effective: 1) learning self-compassion and being compassionate to yourself to address self-worth and 2) learning self-efficacy to increase self-esteem. You may wish to work on both of them if you are going to overcome the monsters of worthlessness and low self-esteem! In the next section, we focus on strategies to improve self-worth. Strategies for increasing self-esteem will be covered in Chapter 3.

Increasing Self-Worth by Cultivating Self-Compassion

An excellent strategy for increasing self-worth involves cultivating something called compassion for ourselves. This is also known as practicing self-compassion. Several researchers have examined the positive impact of practicing self-compassion, including Drs. Kristin Neff, Christopher Germer, Paul Gilbert, and Brené Brown, among others. The word compassion derives from the Latin phrase 'to bear with.' Compassion is like empathy in action. Empathy can be conceptualized as being able to feel for another, but compassion involves an active component of doing something about it! Just as compassion for others involves acting on feelings of empathy, self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or beating ourselves up with self-criticism. For some of us, approaching our own feelings of self-criticism or low self-worth with compassion can be incredibly freeing, allowing us to embrace ourselves with loving kindness rather than with frustration or doubt.

Increased self-compassion is associated with a number of positive psychological strengths. Research by developmental psychologist, Kristin Neff, Ph.D., and others has demonstrated that people who have higher levels of self-compassion as a trait report feeling happier than those with lower levels (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Neff et al., 2007; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010; Smeets et al., 2014). People with high levels of self-compassion also display higher levels of optimism, gratitude, positive affect, emotional intelligence, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity, intellectual flexibility, life satisfaction, and feelings of social connectedness according to researchers in this area (Neff, 2003; Breen et al., 2010; Neff et al., 2007; Heffernan, et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2011).Thus, there are many good things that come from practicing self-compassion!

The best part of all of this is that even if you were not born with high levels of self-compassion, you can learn to do things to increase your self-compassion. Increasing self-compassion can be achieved in multiple ways, but it does take intention and practice! According to Dr. Neff, self-compassion can be increased by being gentle, kind, and understanding with yourself – accepting that you are not perfect, and accepting that there is potential for learning and growth in every mistake you make (Neff, 2003). This understanding of compassion means offering patience, kindness, and nonjudgmental understanding to others as well as oneself. Remember – self-compassion is not the same thing as selfishness! Showing compassion toward yourself is an intentional act of self-care that may help you feel stronger and more capable to help others!

There is increasing evidence that self-compassion meditation has such a wonderful impact on us due, in part, to what it does neurologically to our brains and physiologically to our bodies. The positive emotional and behavioral effects appear to be associated with changes in neural circuitry in the brain known to be related to empathy (Klimecki et al., 2013). Even better, it looks like it only takes a relatively short amount of training to significantly improve positive regard for self and others (Hutcherson et al., 2008) and prosocial behavior toward strangers (Leiberg et al., 2011). Additionally, practicing self-compassion appears to decrease our cortisol levels which helps us feel safe emotionally. Cortisol is a stress hormone that gets activated when we are under stress and it has been shown to have negative effects on our mood and body. Researchers Dr. Helen Rockliff and her colleagues, including Paul Gilbert (Rockliff et al., 2008), conducted research on self-compassion in volunteers and found that people who were asked to imagine receiving compassion and feeling it in their bodies had lower cortisol levels and increased physical heart-rate markers of feeling safe after the imagery than those in a control group who did not do the exercise. The safer people feel, the more open and flexible they can be in response to their environment. Additional research has demonstrated that self-compassion reduces inflammatory responses of the body, which again, are markers of stress (Breines et al., 2014). Being able to intentionally improve these physiological correlates of stress is a very adaptive and helpful skill, and appears to be a direct effect of practicing self-compassion. Imagine the profound positive impacts on society if everyone practiced compassion and self-compassion!

Three Components of Self-Compassion

Drawing on the writings of various modern-day Buddhist teachers, Kristin Neff (2003) has operationalized self-compassion into three main elements: kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. These three components all combine and interact to make up self-compassion. It may be useful to think of the three components of self-compassion in terms of loving (kindness), connected (common humanity), presence (mindfulness). When we practice 'kind and loving connected presence' we simultaneously generate positive emotions while lessening our negative emotions through self-soothing.

The first step to cultivating self-compassion is to acknowledge that you are not perfect and that it is OK. The idea is to accept this and be gentle with yourself and not punish yourself for your mistakes. You can do this in many ways, but it may be helpful at first to give yourself visual reminders. For example, you can place sticky notes with positive self-affirmations in places where you will see them daily. The one I have on my bathroom mirror says 'I love you unconditionally, just as you are right now.' I have worked with some people who wrote specific Bible passages or inspirational quotes on their sticky notes. A patient of mine who was a single mother suffering from low self-worth wrote affirmations on her bathroom mirror in lipstick. Her teenage son came in one morning and read them: 'You are a worthy person… you have a right to be here… you have a right to a good life.' She was initially embarrassed that he saw these statements and stayed quiet. He then asked if she had written them on her mirror, and when she said yes, he said matter-of-factly, 'Well, they are all true!'

The main idea is that the statement needs to mean something to you and needs to help you remember to be gentle and kind to yourself – to put your empathy in action for yourself! Another good quote is:

> There is no sense in punishing your future for the mistakes of your past. Forgive yourself, grow from it, and then let it go. (Koulouris, 2013, blog post)

I could go on and on with inspirational quotes, but you get the idea! These positive statements will help you remember to be gentle with yourself and thus may also lead to a different mindset.

Having a mindset of acceptance and understanding can be very helpful in cultivating compassion and help you *approach* situations instead of *avoiding* them or shutting down emotionally. This is often referred to as a 'growth mindset' in psychological terms and has been studied extensively by psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck and her colleagues at Stanford (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Research suggests that a growth mindset is one that focuses on learning from adversity and hard work over time – in other words learning resilience. This kind of growth mindset can be taught and can have a positive impact on self-compassion as well as resiliency (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). We all have adversity in our lives, but not all suffer because of it. If you hold on to negative emotions related to your adversity, this is not a growth mindset. If you acknowledge and accept that you have experienced adversity – which is *not* the same as thinking it is okay or a good thing, but rather accepting that it is what it is – then you can actually learn from it. This is a growth mindset. A growth mindset can allow you to focus on the opportunities in the present because you are not hanging on to the negative past.

Dump Negative Self-Talk

Remember also that some of your negative self-talk will be related to your old ‘soundtracks’ of negative or limiting things that you carry with you from early years. Remember just because you think it, or feel it, does not mean it is true! Take the time to pause, remind yourself you have worth, and then focus on being KIND to yourself! Once you have some mastery of catching yourself when you are not being compassionate, you can then shift into strategies to begin to show compassion to yourself. Another wonderful strategy to use if you find yourself saying negative and harsh things to yourself is to ask yourself if you would say those things to someone you love dearly – like a friend or even a pet. If the answer is ‘no,’ then you may not want to say them to yourself. We often say harsh and hateful things to ourselves that we would never say to someone we love. Self-compassion starts with saying more loving things to yourself.

Remember, you have worth and you are worthy of love. So, next time you do not rise to the expectations you have for yourself, take a moment to pause and reassess. Practice kindness toward yourself. As we have noted, the practice of self-compassion is intimately tied to mindfulness and to taking the pause, being present, and not judging. Self-compassion comes from the understanding, gleaned through moments of mindfulness, that every human being suffers, that we all want to be happy but often don’t know how to find happiness, and that this commonality connects us with everyone else. Understanding these truths, recognizing our own vulnerabilities, and intentionally practicing self-compassion can help us gain feelings of self-worth and improve our lives in ways we may not even imagine.

We each have had experiences cultivating self-compassion and both of us can attest to the fact that it takes intention and effort, and that it does work!

Kim and Morgan Find Self-Compassion

Kim's Story

I was and still am a person who pushes myself hard. I worked hard most of my life, not just for myself, but looking back, I think I was also working hard to get my father's attention and approval. I guess one of my 'rules' I learned was that I was not good enough. I look back now and realize that I was making my self-worth contingent upon his approval.

It wasn't until I was in my early 40s, when my mother died, that I began to practice self-compassion and my self-worth and relationship with my father shifted. My mother's death was unexpected and sudden and shook my family's world. As the first born, at my mother's death, I automatically resumed my duties as the child who got things done. I made cremation and funeral arrangements, took care of my siblings and father, made sure we all ate, etc. My mother had the foresight to write down exactly what she wanted us to do when she died. She wanted a celebration of her life – no black clothing, no sad music, or dreadful funeral processions. She wanted her favorite music, and lots of color, flowers, children, and animals! We followed her explicit directions and had an outdoor party celebrating her life. People brought their pets. There were children and elderly people. Those who knew her brought lovely flowering plants and colorful balloons with scrolls of parchment to write notes to her and send them to the heavens on the string of a balloon. There was an abundance of music and dancing! At the conclusion we released a dozen white doves – just like you might see at a wedding, except this group of doves had one that broke away from the larger formation and headed up instead of across the sky! It was staggering in its beauty and meaning.

Most of all, my mother encouraged us to be compassionate with ourselves. She made it clear that we were and are loved and valued just for existing and that this did not change due to her no longer being on this earth in a physical form. I took her parting words seriously and began practicing self-compassion. Unlike my daughter, Morgan, I felt more comfortable approaching compassion meditations on my own. I took some of my mother's parting words and things she had written in her journal or in cards to me over the years, and meditated on them. They were mostly self-affirmations that I had seen or heard most of my life, but never really paid much attention to. In my own quiet space, I began to meditate on these phrases and began to believe them deeply. I believe this practice is part of what got me through her death and also what helped me approach my relationship with my father with a more open and accepting perspective. I began to interact with him not in a manner of trying to gain approval, but instead as a compassionate daughter and fellow human. I really listened to him, maybe for the first time, and gave myself permission to hear him not in a judging manner, but as a fully independent and worthy family member. I loved myself and gave myself permission to be human and in doing so, saw him as more human. I gained self-compassion, as well as compassion for my father, and this is what deepened my relationship with my father and still nourishes our connection.

Morgan's Story

I experienced one of my first tastes of true self-worth – one that came from a deep sense of meaning within myself, and not from external factors – on a cold, snowy morning in a large meditation hall.

'For this morning's meditation, I invite you to close your eyes, find a comfortable seated position, and gently begin to notice your breath,' the meditation leader, Leah, instructed with a voice that sounded like caramel. Her presence exuded calmness and a steady sense of peace.

I shifted my weight on the meditation cushion, trying my best to settle down my body after the soreness of my run earlier that morning began to set in. As if in unison with those around me, I gently allowed my eyes to become heavy, focusing on my breath as it deepened and slowed.

After a few moments of silent breathing, Leah's smooth voice broke the silence.

'Know, now, in this moment, that you have worth just for existing.'

At this moment, I felt my heart shift. Something deep within me was touched in a way that I'd never felt. Before I knew it, I broke into tears.

When I was reminded of my worth – the pure worth that I held just by existing – on that long winter retreat, on the first day of 2013, it occurred to me that this was a reminder that I didn't even know I needed.

I realized that I had attributed so much of my worth to factors outside of myself, like how well I did academically and in my extracurriculars, how aesthetically attractive others perceived me to be, or how proud my parents and teachers were of my accomplishments. What hurt worse was how much pressure I felt to be perfect to everyone else. I wanted to look like the girls that every boy thought was attractive, even though I look back now and realize the foolishness of such a desire. I wanted to seem as cool as my party animal, don't-give-a-damn-about-the-rules high school boyfriend. I wanted to have it all – brains, beauty, the 'cool' factor. It took me a long time to be proud of my academic accomplishments, anyway – but at the time of the sangha, I wanted to keep my academic success but also be the "perfect" 17-year-old girl.

Being told that I had worth for merely existing seemed so counter-intuitive. To have worth, didn't I have to accomplish something phenomenal? Didn't I have to look a certain way or act a certain way or go somewhere specific? Didn't I have to be from a certain place, know certain people, be a part of a certain group?

Nope. I didn't. And that shit shook me.

The time spent on those cushions in the main hall of Seven Oaks Retreat Center in Madison, Virginia, during the cold, snowy week of New Year's Eve 2013 taught me that the person who'd guide me most, and remind me of my inherent worth, was me.

What You Can Do to Help Yourself Now

If you have taken an inventory of your own 'rules,' 'maps' and have a deeper knowledge of your old 'soundtracks' as we previously discussed, you can use this knowledge to understand yourself better. In doing this, you can begin to intellectually understand where some of the thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions you have come from, and also begin to accept them and accept yourself as you are right now. How could you be in anything else other than what you are right now? All that has happened to you has created you and led up to who you are today. Being with this is called acceptance. Acceptance doesn't necessarily mean that you think it is okay or that you are fine with it. Acceptance means that you recognize that it is what it is. This allows you to be with it, approach it, instead of avoiding or denying it.

Remember the three components of self-compassion and focus on these in your work… *kind, connected, presence. Kindness* is the first step. With acceptance comes the ability to be gracious and kind to yourself. One thing you can do right now is to be kind in the face of difficulties. It is also important to remember that you are human and that no humans escape pain or failure. Adopting this viewpoint will help you recognize that you're not alone in your experiences of pain and failure. This can also help you be more compassionate toward others – *connected.* Being *present* in the moment in a nonjudgmental way is the third component of self-compassion, and this is typically referred to as 'mindfulness.' An excellent practical strategy to help increase self-compassion combines these elements in an exercise that has demonstrated effectiveness. This exercise is called a 'loving kindness meditation,' also known as a 'metta meditation.' Metta is a Pali word that is most often translated as 'loving kindness' but can also be thought of as meaning 'goodwill toward others.'

Loving Kindness Meditation

One initial way to practice self-compassion is to practice metta or loving kindness meditation. Below is one you can do alone or with someone. Start off by just setting aside a few seconds or minutes a day – it can be in the morning or evening, or anytime when you will remember and have the opportunity. Start by choosing a verbal affirmation that is meaningful to you. It is important that you make this your own – it needs to resonate with you. Here are some examples, but please use what works for you.

- May I be happy
- May I be healthy
- May I live with ease
- May I be kind to myself

- May I be gentle and loving
- May I experience love and joy
- May I live life to the fullest extent
- May I accept myself, just as I am
- May I feel peace and contentment

Next, sit comfortably in a chair with your feet firmly planted on the ground or lay in a slightly upright position bed, perhaps with your shoulders and head propped up with a pillow. If you are seated, allow your spine to grow tall toward the ceiling, then relax your shoulders. Place your hands in a comfortable position that feels supportive. Take a few deep breaths. With full intention, repeat your chosen affirmation.

As you continue to practice, extend these well-wishes to others. You can extend these wishes to others you love or are fond of, and then expand and offer these wishes to those you do not know well, or even eventually to people in your life that you do not get along with. It may feel awkward or even silly at first, but allow yourself to explore this and actively wish these things for others in addition to yourself.

- May my loved ones live with ease
- May my family experience love and joy
- May my neighbors feel peace and contentment
- May the strangers I walk with live their lives to the fullest
- May those I have a conflict with be accepting and loving to themselves
- May the people of the world be kind and supportive to themselves
- May all creatures of the earth feel peace and contentment

Spend some time reflecting on the concept of self-compassion. Whether it's a new concept for you or something you actively practice, think about where and how you can be kinder to yourself. What challenges do you have? At what points in your life has it been particularly difficult to be kind to yourself? How can you prepare yourself to be more self-compassionate in the future?

Remind yourself of what you have learned through all of these exercises, and know that you hold the power in your own life. Revel in your well-earned sense of self-worth and remember that you may have to work to maintain it. You will need to continue to practice self-compassion every day and eventually it may become second-nature! You can also help others learn about self-compassion.

What You Can Do to Help a Young Person

One of the best ways to promote self-worth is to start early! If young people are treated with compassion and informed of their worth, this can go a long way in promoting positive self-worth. If you have a child or adolescent in your life right now, you have a great opportunity to help them build their own self-worth when they are young. You can help build a young person's self-worth in several ways, including modeling behavior! Children are excellent learners and one of the main ways they learn is via social learning or observing what others in their lives do. Thus, you can explain to young people how you are practicing self-compassion. You can explicitly teach them how to say more self-affirming things to themselves, and you can remind them of their own implicit worth.

Model Behavior

Notice how you behave and what you say in front of the younger people around you. Notice if you are saying negative, unkind things, or if your face or body language are reflecting judgment. If so, try to focus on self-compassion for yourself and then expanding compassion to others. Younger people will learn from watching what you do, so let them see you practicing self-compassion. Let them see you be resilient and kind to yourself, even under stress or when things have not gone well. You can make a point to say out loud compassionate coping statements such as 'This is frustrating, but we will get through it.' or 'I am disappointed, but I know that everyone tried their best.' Researchers, especially in healthcare and child psychology, are finding the key to a happy and successful life is resilience, that is, being able to rebound in the face of difficulties (Delaney, 2018; Cousineau et al., 2019). And the key to resilience is self-compassion. Learning this early can prevent a lifetime of low self-worth!

All the strategies and techniques that you may learn, create, and use to promote your own self-worth can be taught to a child or young person. You can teach even the youngest child how to wish good things for themselves and others. Research is increasingly demonstrating the positive effects of this kind of loving kindness meditation on well-being, resilience, positive emotions, as well as deepening social connections and prosocial behavior (Kok et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Klimecki et al., 2013).

Would You Say That to Someone You Like?

You can also help a child who is struggling by asking them how they would support a friend with the same issue. What would they say to their best friend if their friend was in the same position? As we have pointed out, often we are all harder on ourselves than we are on our good friends and loved ones. If we teach young people to extend the same kindness and understanding to themselves as they would to a dear friend, they may learn early the benefits of self-compassion.

Mindful of Thoughts and Emotions

Learning to identify and label our own thoughts and emotions is another mindful technique that can help children and young people become more familiar with the content and impact of their thoughts and emotions and teach them to approach them with gentle curiosity and acceptance. You can do this by providing words to help them describe their thoughts, emotions, and even behaviors and actions. You can help a young person understand the connection between these things as well as how they are somewhat subjective. It is often helpful to discuss the range of words that can describe levels of intensity of an emotion. For instance, you can discuss the difference between hate, anger, irritation, and annoyance. We used to play a word game with Morgan where the goal was to think of as many emotions as you can that are similarly related – such as all the words for love or excitement. The fun part is that the game used the stem sentence 'Why do you have to be so…' The descriptive word would be inserted at the end of the sentence. Some folks got very sassy and it was very fun! 'Why do you have to be so… angry?' 'Why do you have to be so cranky?' 'Why do you have to be so cantankerous?' You get the drift…

You can use strategies to help young people understand the connection between what they think and their emotions, or the impact of both on their behaviors and actions. One idea is to help a child label their emotions on a chart and then help them connect the emotion to a behavior on the other side of the chart. Thus, 'sad' on one side may be connected to 'crying' behavior on the other side. This is a very helpful strategy and I have found that some children who will not verbalize are willing to draw lines connecting their thoughts to emotions and emotions to behavior. This not only helps them better understand what is happening to them but also communicates this information to others.

Validation and Acceptance

To help young people accept both their positive and negative feelings, many psychologists suggest validating their experiences and emotions and also providing a gentle reality check. Avoid being dismissive or rushing them to feel better. Give your young people the space and permission to process their feelings, whatever they are. You can help young people search for evidence that challenges their low self-worth statements. Remind them of other points of view while still being respectful of their feelings. If a child is rejected for a part in a school play and feels sad, and says something like 'I am no good, I will never be picked for a part in the school play!' You can allow the child to feel their legitimate emotions, and remember to put it in perspective. Both can be held and this helps build resilience.

Self-compassion is essential for all of us to learn, children and young people included. Self-compassion means accepting yourself as the imperfect person that you are and allowing those you love to do the same. When you embrace the idea that you'll never be perfect, you can accept that mistakes are an important part of your life's journey that contribute to who you are. Being kinder to yourself can also boost your resiliency and allow you to be kinder and more compassionate toward others.

Exercises to Discover Your Worth

Breathe Deeply: You Are Here

This exercise includes practicing self-awareness and positive self-statements, as well as breathing techniques that enhance this sensation.

- Sit, stand, or lie down in a comfortable position – wherever you are
- Breathe deeply, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. If you want, you can count the breaths like so: *inhale, 1, 2, 3… exhale, 1, 2, 3…* Take three deep breaths
- Repeat to yourself this phrase: 'I am worthy of love. I am worthy of life. I am worthy of kindness. I am worthy of freedom'
- Continue to repeat this phrase for 30 seconds to a minute, or even longer if it suits you
- End the practice by breathing deeply, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. You can try to practice the same breathing technique that we began with, or you can do something different
- You can also wrap your arms around yourself in a hug if it feels right
- Thank yourself for reminding yourself of your worth

Growing and Trusting

Depending on your childhood experiences, this exercise may or may not feel totally comfortable to begin your self-compassion practice. If you'd like to try this first, go for it! But, also know that you can come back to this after you've had some practice if remembering your childhood can feel difficult sometimes.

- Take a comfortable seated, standing, or lying down position. If you're laying down, be sure to prop yourself up with something like a pillow to keep yourself alert during this practice
- Close your eyes and take three deep breaths (or more if that suits you). Imagine yourself as a child. You can be any age that comes to mind, but try to keep it before puberty/teenage years
- In your mind's eye, imagine reaching out to that child. How do they feel right now? Are they content, or lonely, or frustrated? Try to label how the child in your mind's eye feels without judgment

- Imagine what the child needs at the moment. If they're content, do they need a soft nudge or high-five? If they're lonely, do they need a hug or a kind affirmation? If they're frustrated, do they need someone to talk to, or to take a few deep breaths
- As the image of what the child needs comes to mind, imagine your grown-up self-giving your younger self what they need in this moment. Imagine giving yourself a hug, or a high-five, or helping them to take deep breaths
- As you do this, remember that while this memory may be of you as a child, you can still help your present-day self. You can find ways to give yourself reassuring words or breathe deeply. You can even hug yourself if you want
- Sometimes it can be easier to imagine helping your younger, child-like self because of the inherent innocence and worth associated with childhood. If your childhood did not feel that way, it can still be a beautiful reminder that the child within you can still benefit from your kind words and calmness. Maybe try to come back to this practice if you're ever feeling frustrated with adult life or need some extra help giving yourself some love. It may surprise you how beautiful and meaningful this practice can become

Journaling – Words of Worth

- Take out a pen and a piece of paper
- Take three deep breaths slowly, counting *1-2-3* on the inhale and *1-2-3* down the exhale. Close your eyes if it feels right
- If your eyes are closed, open them gently, focusing on the paper below you
- Write 'I Am Worthy Of' at the top of your paper
- Underneath that phrase, list at least three things that you'd like to believe you're worthy of. If it's difficult to find what you want for yourself, start by thinking of someone you deeply love. What do you think they're worthy of
- List the items below 'I Am Worthy Of.' For example, you may write, 'Love, Respect, Kindness'

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2 Life Is Not Fair: Cope with It!

Introduction to Unfairness, Injustice, and Distress

Eric was a very tense middle-aged man who oozed unhappiness and anger. He reluctantly showed up for a group therapy session one spring afternoon and seemed to be about to jump out of his skin. His body was tense as he sat awkwardly in his chair at the edge of the room, and his face grew increasingly red. As the group members introduced themselves one by one, Eric seemed to get more and more irritated. When his turn finally came, and everyone's eyes were upon him, he blurted out that he felt like it was not fair that he had to be at this therapy session. He said his physician referred him and told him that he needed to attend. Eric stated clearly that he did not think he belonged in the group. He said that his main problem was all the other people in his life who hassled him – his girlfriend, his boss, his neighbor. He stated that the people in his life treated him unfairly and that his life had never been fair and he was sick of it!

Life, indeed, is not fair and this can often be very challenging for people. People, like Eric, look around them and see the obvious and painful examples of life's fundamental unfairness. They see how they got passed over for the promotion that they thought they deserved… they look back on their life and see that it wasn't fair that their father was an abusive drunk, or that their love interest did not return their feelings. They see that there are everyday inequalities in the world and that this seems wrong. Some people are born prettier, smarter, more athletic, musically talented, etc. These unfair things are inescapable. Additionally, we look around society and see *injustices*. Injustice is similar to unfairness, and you might even think of it as a subset of 'man-made' unfairness. What we might call 'natural unfairness' which are things like being born with little musical talent, or being in a natural disaster aren't typically called 'injustices,' presumably because no human is responsible for them. Additionally, unfairness that emerges from true human accident isn't typically called injustice, but instead is thought of as a tragic error. An example might be a natural disaster.

I will define injustice as when humans increase unfairness either intentionally or unintentionally. This is really just a word choice issue, as most of us respond negatively to both unfair and unjust acts. I will use these terms somewhat interchangeably, but will try to focus on using unfair and unjust as appropriately as possible given this definition.

It is easy to identify the larger societal injustices of the world as they are highlighted on the news and in front of us every day. Some are profound injustices such as the fact that a minority of the world's population (17%) consumes 80% of its resources (Lang et al., 2018). In fact, even though economists say that global wealth has grown overall in the past decade, significant inequality still persists. For example, women still only account for less than 40% of human capital wealth because of lower earnings, lower labor force participation, and fewer average hours of work (Lang et al., 2018). These things all seem profoundly unjust. Then there are everyday encounters with injustice, like those around us who suffer microaggressions from others, subtle unfairness, or blatant favoritism or bias. There are also the daily hassles that seem unfair – having your game rained out, missing the bus, or the deli being out of your favorite cheese.

We don't always think about it, but people's perception of fairness or unfairness can differ depending on their culture, the situation, or the individual's personal values and preferences. We all feel that we are treated unfairly once in a while, but there are many ways to conceptualize fairness. Some different ways might include:

- The idea of equity, which is that everyone should be treated the same. Things should be equitable or at least equal in order to be fair
- A corollary of this is the idea that people should be honest with each other. People should tell the truth and expect to be told the whole truth
- The idea that you get back what you put in. This means that if you work harder you should get more, and if you contribute less, you get less
- The idea of promoting social good, which means that people who are at a disadvantage because of poverty, discrimination, or disability are allowed to have some extra help to 'level the playing field.'
- The idea of punishing those who violate these rules, which means there should be consequences for those who act in unfair ways

Each person's definition of fairness or unfairness will depend, in part, on which of the above concepts is guiding their worldview at the time. A person's definition of injustice is also influenced by their values and 'rules' that we discussed in Chapter 1. These are the rules or 'maps' that are learned from early experiences with others and that inform our way of thinking about ourselves, other people, and the world at large.

Often these 'maps' are not something that people are consciously aware of unless they actively work to uncover them.

You can become more aware of these 'maps' or 'rules' by thinking about what things make you feel like life is not fair. Do you believe in any of the bulleted statements above? Do you reject any of them? Are there certain things in life that you find to be particularly unjust? For example, do you feel strongly that society should care for those who can't look out for themselves? Do you feel strongly that everyone in society should carry their own weight and contribute – that there should be no 'free-loaders?' Do you think everyone should follow the rules? Do you think rules are artificial mechanisms to control people? These just might be issues that are relevant to you, in part, due to your 'maps' as well as being relevant issues in today's society. Our sense of injustice can come in many flavors and as many of you probably know, once these 'rules' are set in people's minds, it can be very difficult to change them or even begin to question them. In fact, the perception of things being unfair, or what we might call perceived injustice, is one of the strongest pulls for negative emotions that humans experience, as we will get into later in this chapter.

Regardless of how you view fairness, if you are human, you will inevitably be subjected to something that you think of as unfair. It is a fact of life that we will all be subject to random obstacles, injustices, or things that don't work out at some point. Whether it's a fender bender, a boss who doesn't see your worth, a sudden illness, or something that doesn't go your way, you will likely feel unfairly disadvantaged and you will experience the stress of this emotion.

Kim's Introduction to Unfairness

My husband, David, and I tried to teach our daughter early that life was full of possibilities and could be an exhilarating experience and yet also not fair at all. This is a tough lesson to try and teach someone you love – especially a child who you have dedicated your life to protecting and nourishing! We were GenXers raising a daughter during the early 2000s, when all children participating in school and after school activities, sports, dance, etc. seemed to get awards! Everyone was a winner – whether it was for actually winning, trying hard, showing most improvement, or just for participating. Morgan accumulated about five awards over the years for 'Most Team Spirit!' Yes, there is a trophy for that – and I was thrilled! I wanted to see her win a prize, even if she wasn't the player scoring the highest! Perhaps my generation, who had to develop what some call 'grit' growing up in the 1970s and 80s, overcompensated for our 'gritty' upbringing and became overly protective in trying to make things 'fair' for our children. It hurt to see a child try hard and not win, and parents of my generation fully embraced the belief that effort should be rewarded even in failure – that all should have prizes! Maybe this was in part because many of us remembered the bitter feelings of being cut from a team, not getting the part in the play, not getting into our top college, being bullied, excluded, or being disappointed in other ways by the responses of others around us. Those things absolutely made us tougher and more resilient, and they also hurt. I think people of my generation wanted to protect our own children from such pain. I know I did.

I actually remember very well when I was introduced to the idea that things in life are not fair and it blew my mind! I was a little girl and my father had just bought a coloring book for me. It was brand new, but when I quickly flipped through it, I noticed that many of the pages had a big black mark through the middle of them. There was a flaw in the printing of this book and I pointed this out to my father, asking him how the store could sell this imperfect coloring book! I was outraged, or at least as outraged as a 6-year-old can be, and demanded to know how this could happen and why anyone would sell an imperfect coloring book. My father puzzled over this question and eventually informed me that he thought that is exactly why the store was selling them – to try and get rid of them. His comments lead me to believe that this egregious act was perpetrated intentionally by the store, which was mind boggling to my young self. I told him this was not fair! He told me, I thought, quite casually, that life is not fair and sometimes this is hard to understand. That was it, end of discussion. I had to sit a long time with that one! It was as if something shifted in my brain and I added a new dimension to my understanding of the world. As I look back now, I can see that my own 'map' or 'rule' of the world that things should be what they claim to be and that people and organizations should be honest had been violated. The realization of injustice gradually entered my mind as I observed my world around me with new, more cynical eyes. I did indeed notice that unfair things were not just passively tolerated in the world, but often encouraged and not always for reasons that seemed to make sense! I think that at a young age I realized that injustices exist and I began examining which things I could do something about and which I could not.

Injustice, Unfairness, and the Brain

Neuroscientists would probably say that my 6-year-old mind was not necessarily 'blown,' but instead that my anterior insula was activated when I perceived injustice. Research by neuroscientists has demonstrated that when we perceive unfairness, this area of our brain is activated. This brain area is associated with contempt or disgust reactions, and in fact, is the same area that gets activated when we smell or taste something we don't like! Drs. Tabibnia and Leiberman are researchers at the

Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at the University of California Los Angeles and they have studied how human brains respond to fair and unfair interactions. They demonstrated that when people perceive a fair interaction, the reward centers of the brain get activated (the ventral striatum, amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex [OFC] and ventromedial prefrontal cortex [VLPFC] to be precise). These are the same areas associated with automatic and intuitive reactions and less related to learned reactions. Some scientists take this to mean that it is our basic instinct to enjoy a fair interaction and feel disgust and repulsion at an unfair interaction (Lieberman & Tabibnia, 2007). It is hard-wired into us.

Another professional who wrote about reactions to injustice was Dr. Viktor Frankl. He was an Austrian psychiatrist who was imprisoned in the concentration camps during the Holocaust. He wrote a book about his experiences called *Man's Search for Meaning*. In this 1946 book, he observed that when individuals were beaten by guards or punished severely for no reason or for next-to-no reason, the emotional pain and humiliation of unjust treatment was almost harder to bear than the physical pain of being beaten. Taken together, the research and anecdotal reports show that unjust treatment seems to be intrinsically strongly aversive to humans and that fair treatment is inherently pleasurable to humans.

All this adds up to very powerful negative emotions for most humans who face or witness perceived injustice and unfairness! It is so powerful that many people become outraged when something occurs that they perceive as unjust, unfair, excessive, or otherwise inappropriate. This is true even if the injustice is done to someone else and witnessed by you (Lind & Van den Bos, 2001)! Some researchers say we may be wired this way to help promote cooperation in our groups (Reis & Martin, 2008). Other researchers have explored characteristics of people who are more or less prone to what they call 'justice sensitivity' and discovered that some of us are even more impacted by perceived injustices – not just to ourselves, but those occurring in the larger world (Baumert et al., 2011). This gets back to the idea that while we all may be hardwired as humans to react negatively to unfairness and injustice, some of us are even more impacted than others. We may just be born that way.

We may not be able to control whether we have high or low 'justice sensitivity,' but we can increase our self-awareness and become more intentional around the topic of unfairness and injustice. One of the most important ideas around the topic of addressing unfairness and injustice is the notion of control. Many of us when confronted with unfairness and injustice feel outrage or helplessness or both. Much like 6-year-old Kim, many people are in disbelief or overwhelmed with negative emotions in response to unfair things in the world. These reactions, although natural, may not help you get through the situation very effectively.

How to Approach Feelings of Unfairness and Injustice

When we encounter something we think of as unfair, most of us will naturally feel a pull of emotion – we do not like things that are unfair, and now we know that it is hard-wired into us. With this knowledge, we can use this insight to then pause and examine the situation more closely – perhaps even with curiosity. We need to examine if our expectations are unrealistic, are we perceiving things accurately, is there anything we can do to change the situation or not? As I stated earlier, one of the differences between unfair and unjust is the human causal factor behind injustice. We typically think of unfair acts as not being influenced or caused by human effort, whereas injustices are. So, determining if you are encountering an unfair situation *versus* an unjust situation can be helpful.

Awareness: Breathe Deeply and Accept

At the first sense of unfairness or injustice, you can remind yourself of what is going on – you are being activated and it is a strong emotional reaction. This emotion or the negative thoughts associated with it can be a clue to you that you need to pause. You need to take a deep breath, come back into your body, and identify what is happening. Life is not fair and this hurts – injustice feels painful and wrong. This is a cue to take a deep breath and pause. Be mindful, attend to the present, tell yourself 'it is what it is.' This is a form of mindful acceptance, and it has been shown by researchers who developed Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to be very helpful in reducing negative emotions in such situations (Hayes et al., 2006). Next, think about what you are facing. Think about whether or not somebody intentionally created a hostile or unfair situation or if anybody can realistically do anything to change things? This is the second step toward addressing feelings of unfairness and injustice: evaluate if you (or anyone) can do anything about the situation or not – do you have any control over the situation or is this something that concerns you but over which you have zero control? If you just got rear-ended in a car, it may or may not be your fault, but it is a done deal now. You cannot turn back time or make it not have happened. This would be a situation where you recognize that the circumstances are beyond your control to change – it is unfair that you were hit by a car, and there is not anything you can do about it. You can certainly take care of what needs to be done to move forward and you can do it in a productive manner or you could hold on to the emotion of the injustice of the situation, identify as a victim, scream at the person, and ultimately end up worse off than you were before.

What Can You Control?

If you feel a sense of injustice and pause, breathe deeply, and then examine the situation, you might sometimes find situations where you can make a difference. If you witness another person being bullied or disadvantaged in some way that seems unjust to you, you can explore your options. This is again, easier to do, if you are coming at it from a calmer place, after taking a deep breath. Can you realistically do anything? Can you stand up for the person being bullied? Can you help the woman in the wheelchair trying to get through the door, who is being ignored by others? Maybe you can, maybe you can't, but it is worth a pause, deep breath, and a genuine consideration of your options from a calmer perspective or point of view. Remember, feelings of injustice are painful and are signals that we think something is wrong. These strong emotions are meant to motivate us to make positive changes if and when we can (Pantea, 2013).

What 'Rules' Are Activated?

Examine your 'maps' or 'rules' – is one of them being activated in the situation? Are things not equal? Was someone not playing by the rules? Did someone lie? Is this a 'hot spot' for you emotionally? If so, this can negatively impact your view of the situation even further and may be a clue that you need to work harder to pause, breathe, and try to examine the situation from a more objective perspective. Some things that can help you become more 'objective' include: taking a deep breath to clear your head and reduce your physiological arousal; repeating in your head a phrase that is safe and centering for you, such as 'I am letting it be' or 'I am present and aware.' You can also imagine yourself in the situation, but from an observer perspective – watching what is happening. This is as if you were watching what is unfolding on TV. This strategy helps you gain perspective and objectivity so that you may be better able to identify your automatic thoughts or assumptions associated with your 'rules' and the violation of them. Each person has their own set of learned rules and spending time to get to know them and think about them in thoughtful ways is definitely useful. Additionally, as stated, there are some general themes regarding rules that are violated and that then lead to feelings of unfairness or injustice.

We, as humans, generally believe that good things should come to good people and bad things to bad people. This is an example of a fairly universal 'rule' that humans may believe without even thinking about its accuracy. We create rules that enforce order and reject chaos, says resiliency researchers Drs. Andrew Shatté and Karen Reivich (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Dr. Shatté has specifically studied how people cope with and overcome feelings of injustice or unfairness. Both psychologists focus on the importance of increasing resilience. Dr. Shatté and his research colleagues propose that we believe 'Good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people, because we need to believe that the world is safe. But unfortunately, bad things do happen to good people, and this disrupts our sense of safety' (Reivich & Shatté, 2002, p. 106).

Use Positive Resiliency

A first-line strategy to cope with the fundamental idea of unfairness is to try to make peace with how unpredictable life is and celebrate the times when things work out. The world is large and complex and humans have made it even more so. Accepting this and all that it implies is a large ask, and it will pay off enormously, if you can pull it off, even just a little. For instance, have you ever had your luggage lost or delayed during an airline flight? You land at your destination, but not with your clothes, toiletries, shoes, etc. Many people see this as a violation of the rule that things should run as promised – that I did my part, and now the airlines should live up to their end of the deal. Thinking this way can lead to very negative emotions, physical activation, and ultimately potentially negative interpersonal interactions. Or you can look at things a different way and keep in mind the complexities of modern airline travel post-9/11. This may prepare you to stay realistic in your goals and expectations. For example, I try to get into this mindset whenever I travel by plane, and by thinking about the complexity of travel and the realities of modern challenges, I am consistently amazed that my luggage arrives at the same location that I do most of the time! It is utterly amazing to me with all the complexities of the airline industry, the threats, risks, weather issues, mechanical breakdowns, human error, and the millions of people flying and working at the airlines, that most of the time, my luggage arrives on time, in the right place, and mostly intact – Wow! I would much rather squeal with surprise when I spot my old green suitcase on that creaky conveyer belt versus grumble about how it takes so long to get there!

While it's true that uncertainty comes with risk and can feel uneasy, it can also bring joy to our lives in the form of serendipity, coincidence, and surprise. Research shows that when dealing with the unknown, people tend to overestimate the risks and negative consequences. This is so well known that it has a name – the negativity bias (Vaish et al., 2008). As humans, we tend to:

- Remember traumatic experiences better than positive ones
- Recall insults better than praise

- React more strongly to negative stimuli
- Think about negative things more frequently than positive ones
- Respond more strongly to negative events than to equally positive ones

For example, you might be having a productive day at work but then the power goes out, your computer shuts off, and you lose all the hours of work from the morning. You immediately panic and try to recover the files, but the updated version is gone. Then you focus on how unfair this is, how angry you are, and what a disaster this all is. You feel horrible – sick, almost – and cannot stop thinking about it, thus making yourself feel worse. Something like this can stay with you all day and evening and influence your mood and how you interact with others. You can even carry your negative feelings and behaviors home to innocent family members and friends. When you get home and are at the dinner table eating with your family and one of them asks how your day was you may snap at them and tell them it was terrible even though it was actually a good day overall, and of course, they had nothing to do with the power outage or your reaction to it.

Another common expectation that can make us feel like life is unfair is the idea that everyone should follow the same rules and that the same rules apply to all. According to neuroscientists such as Dr. Mirre Stallen (2018), we react to unfairness the same way we react to danger: we shift into fight-or-flight mode as the part of the brain that controls fear and anger is activated. In fact, psychologists believe that even when we fight for fairness for others, we are actually motivated in part by self-interest. Why? Because human beings are social animals and our capacity to cooperate is necessary for our survival as a species. When someone breaks the ‘rules’ or gets something they don’t deserve, it threatens our ability to work together – which puts us all at risk. This may be why we are so vulnerable to these negative feelings that come with thinking that something is not fair.

Keep Calm

Staying calm and steady is the best approach when we are activated, especially when facing another common ‘rule’ that everyone has to follow the same rules. Many of us may have an unspoken but profound assumption about fairness and how the rules must apply to everyone equally. The next time someone violates this or one of your other ‘rules,’ try to use emotional control to notice what is happening so you may be better able to respond more thoughtfully instead of reacting impulsively out of emotion. Run through a checklist in your head: What ‘rule’ was broken, and why is it important to you? Was it done intentionally? Are you sure? Is this particular issue worth your time and energy, or are you better off letting it go? After this check-in, you may realize that the situation is not such a big deal in the grand scheme of things. If the loss is not real or too small to bother with, choose to relax and let go. Then focus on something more interesting. This is no small event to let go. Letting something go, although often hard, can pay off tremendously by allowing you to be freer and happier to focus your precious time and energy on more productive and pleasant things!

One of the best ways to calm down if you're already feeling stressed is to stop interacting with the stressor, if possible. Sometimes, even taking a few seconds before you head back into the situation can be enough to help you cool down.

- Try counting to ten, or taking 3–5 slow deep breaths before you reply in a heated conversation or situation
- Take a break. For example, if an argument with someone is getting heated, or you feel emotionally overwhelmed, stop and gently excuse yourself for a moment. Go to a different place, focus on breathing deeply, and recite a calming mantra, such as 'I can handle this calmly.' or 'I can do this'

Take Action

Other times you might still feel strongly that an injustice has occurred that requires you to act - for instance, if you see someone being unkind to another person. When you notice an injustice and have checked in with yourself and have a clear goal that you can control – like 'I want to tell that person that what they said seemed unkind,' then you may decide to address the situation. You will need to keep in mind your goal, and it must be something you can control. You will then be best served if you are assertive in your behavior and explain the impact of what you saw; i.e., 'It made me feel uncomfortable to hear you talk to her that way.' You will also need to clearly state the outcome you want; 'I think it would be ideal if you did not speak to her that way in the future.' Hopefully, this will start a useful dialogue with the other person, but either way, you have spoken up for what you believe is right and that is the primary goal and the main thing you can control. And, it might be enough to make a difference.

Over time you will become more skilled in learning when to let things go and when to dig in and say something or do something. There are going to be times when you need to stand up to what is unfair. There are times to move on. You will become better and better at telling the difference, but it does take practice. Remember, you are fighting instincts that make you fearful, so take a deep breath, clear your head, focus on what you can control, and choose how you want to respond. Over time, you will be better able to stay calm and focused in response to challenges, and you may find that you begin to see fewer unfair situations in your world. Additionally, you will better handle the injustices you see and may be better able to make positive differences when you can.

Go Positive!

Another strategy to proactively build resilience to deal with life's unfairness and injustices is to practice making peace with the unpredictable. One way you can do this, according to Martin Seligman, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist who does research on positive psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, is by keeping a list of positive experiences (Seligman, 1991). These may be things that you couldn't have planned for, like a chance encounter with an old friend while in line to submit a form for your lost luggage, or a lucky break you got, like hitting all green lights on your drive home. Focusing on the positive sounds easier that it often is. It can become easier with time after you have practiced awhile and it becomes a habit. Initially, however, we have to overcome our negativity bias and it may feel forced or awkward to focus on the positive, so make sure and practice every chance you get. Again, the idea is to focus on positive things proactively – you do not need to wait for a situation that you feel is unfair or negative. You can set up formal and structured time to focus on the positive, such as sharing positive events or things that went right with your family or friends over a meal at the end of the day, or writing about them in a journal before bed at night. Dr. Seligman in his book on fostering optimism suggests something similar to below, which he claims can significantly improve your resilience and happiness (Seligman, 2011).

- For the next week find time every day to write down three things that went well and why they went well. These can be anything, as long as it is meaningful to you. Thus, it could be something like, 'My friend sent me a nice email'
- Next to each positive event, answer the question 'Why did this happen?' For example, if you wrote that your friend sent you an email, you might pick as the cause … 'She is a sweet person and good friend.' or you might write 'I reached out to her to touch base and she responded'
- Writing about why the positive events in your life happened may seem awkward at first, but if you stick with it for 1 week, I promise, it will get easier

Morgan's Story about Unfairness

Addressing issues with calm and clear minds is helpful in any situation – and at any age! I learned this lesson in dealing with unfairness, time and time again as a child once I better understood how to deal with difficult peers. I attended a private school that consisted of elementary, middle, and high school campuses. Every year, eighth graders in my middle school faced a day that most tweens anticipated both with excitement and a little bit of fear: 'Shadowing Day.'

This day was especially exciting – and particularly nerve-wracking – because it happened to be the day where each eighth grader got paired up with a corresponding student in the freshman high school class and followed them around for the day. The purpose of this activity was supposedly to allow middle schoolers to explore the unique world of high school, or even form friendships with current high schoolers so they could become more familiar with the concept of high school and all that it entailed. While some kids already had siblings or friends in the high school and may have seen the entire ordeal as lame, others felt excited to get to know this foreign world and perhaps even assert themselves as a 'cool' incoming student. Most of us, though, were relatively nervous and didn't know what to expect. While I remember feeling somewhat nervous, I ultimately didn't feel so bad because the person I was paired with was relatively 'normal' – not a member of any specific clique or too intimidating, even to my middle school self. As I followed her throughout the day, she didn't really speak to me too much, and I noticed most of the other high schoolers straight-up ignoring me. Sometimes there was a snicker from the far corner of the classroom – some 17-year-old boy teasing his 'buddy,' mocking us lowly middle schoolers. Nobody really noticed me much, but if they did, they made a point to make it clear that middle schoolers were not welcome on their turf.

Once I returned home that evening, my mother enthusiastically asked me how 'Shadowing Day' was.

'So, how was it?' She asked animatedly, passing me a dinner plate.

I looked down at my plate, 'Eh. Fine.'

She seemed puzzled at my answer.

'Well, what do you mean? Weren't they nice to you?' Her voice carried a bit more urgency here, as if she were hoping they were nice to me.

I looked at her and almost laughed. 'Of course not! They're high schoolers!'

She reconsidered. 'Really?' She looked as if she were surprised by my nonchalant expression.

'Yeah,' I said. 'I wasn't expecting them to be nice, though, so it didn't bother me.' I shrugged and scooped a helping of pasta on my plate.

Whenever my Mom and I revisit this story, she remarks on how impressed she was that I wasn't offended by the high schoolers' behavior; I simply went into the situation calmly and coolly. If people were nice to me – which probably two were, in passing – I accepted it, but I didn't overthink anything. Ultimately, I didn't expect people to treat me fairly – even as an only child, I knew that no high schooler would actively befriend a measly eighth grader. That's just not how it works. So, since I went into the situation ready to be snickered at and ignored – and that's how it went – I didn't get hurt in the process. It bothered me so little to the point where it took my Mom's memory to help me remember this event. I gave the situation so little of my energy that I nearly wiped it entirely from my memory!

From Morgan's story we can see that she demonstrated an adaptive response to a stressful and fairly unjust situation. The good news is that Morgan was successful, in part, because she did some 'pre-work' before heading to 'Shadowing Day.' This is what Dr. Shatté and his team call the 'pre-mortem' work (as opposed to 'post-mortem' or after-the-fact work). Pre-mortem work is focused on thinking about the outcome and planning realistic goals for what to expect and how to best manage the situation given what few parameters you can control. Morgan knew she needed to visit the Upper School and her goal was to go and learn about the school, its layout, programming, etc. She also had a realistic expectation about what to expect from the older students there. Morgan focused on the goals she could and ignored what she could not control. She did another good thing, which was that once the experience was over and she achieved what she could, she let the unfair and unjust actions slip from her mind. They were not needed, it was not important if an older student looked at her in exasperation – it was over, and she had done what she needed – no more, no less. She was thus able to let it go and get on with her life.

What You Can Do Now

Once you have an action plan to address an injustice in front of you, or decide that you want to let it go, it is important to move on and try not to ruminate about it. You can use the following strategies to reduce ruminations about unfairness:

- Examine your thoughts. Life has an element of randomness and uncontrollable suffering that everybody experiences at some point. You are not an exception. Sometimes unexpected, unfair, and unjust things will happen. Be open to them and try to stay curious. Try to not jump to conclusions or assume you know everything
- Find the lesson in the situation and let the rest go. Maybe you could pay more attention next time or speak up earlier, but what is done is done. Own your part, if you have a part, and then let it go. Give yourself permission to move on. You can even try imagining that you have tied it to a balloon and let it go
- Be compassionate to yourself. Use a compassion meditation to help you be kind to yourself and know that it will help you to be compassionate toward others

- Focus on the good things. You can focus on gratitude for what is going well in your life by writing in a daily example of what you are grateful for. You can also combine this with your contemplation on what went well in your life. Try discussing what's going well in your life in the evening at dinner, or with good friends over coffee. Put energy into areas of life where you have more control, where you find joy and where you have opportunities to succeed

What You Can Do to Help a Young Person Now

As we have discussed, our desire for things to be fair and our dislike for unfairness appears to be at least partly hard-wired. This means that children also experience these unpleasant feelings. Anyone who has been around a young child is, of course, acutely aware of this! Indeed, in humans, the desire to be treated fairly starts early. Researchers have found that children as young as 19 months seem to understand the concept of fairness, and appear surprised by scenes of blatant favoritism – such as when one puppet is given toys and another puppet goes without (Sloane et al., 2012). It is important to recognize this underlying nature when working with children, so that you do not assume that a child is willfully being disobedient just because they get upset about an unfair situation. Remember, they are wired that way, just like us!

Prepare your child by having open discussions about assumptions of fairness and how situations are not always going to work out the way they want. This means watching your own thinking and behaviors and making sure you are not modeling maladaptive ways of coping with things that seem unfair. Are you complaining and saying things aren't fair? Are you getting stressed and angry about things that you cannot control? Are you witnessing injustice, doing nothing and complaining about the injustice? Are you ruminating out loud about past transgressions? If so, you need to know that little ears are listening, and not be surprised if they model your behavior. If you wish to raise a more resilient child, then you may want to start by addressing your own behavior and then actively engaging your child in healthy discussions about how to problem-solve or cope with stressful or unjust situations.

If you are dealing with a child who is grappling with unfairness or injustice, you can use similar strategies that you might use for yourself – but with developmentally appropriate language, of course. Author Katie Hurley (2015) writes about helping children develop resilience and provides some strategies you can use with a child or young person you care about.

Empathize

You may first want to work to help your child know that you want to understand how they are feeling. You can't fix the situation for your child, but you can listen and empathize and validate their emotions. You can say something like, 'it seems like you feel upset because it seems like the rules are being broken and that feels unfair. I know what that feels like.' or 'It's OK to feel upset, but it is not OK to hurt other people just because you feel hurt.'

Discuss Flexible Thinking

Young children tend to struggle with flexible thinking, particularly those who love rules and schedules. Discussing and demonstrating flexibility as a way of being can be a very powerful strategy for all family members. My daughter and I used to have a song that we sang when things seemed unfair or challenging – it had a chorus that went like this: 'All problems have solutions!' The final line was 'They just may not be the solutions you want!' This song demonstrates the importance of hope for effective problem solving and coping, as well as the limitations of reality! It is a catchy tune and served to help remind and remoralize. You can also talk about flexibility by giving visual examples. Children know that things that bend can move into areas that rigid things cannot – think playdough versus plastic blocks. You can explain that one good thing about being flexible is that you don't get stuck in one place. You can move around and make changes without breaking. You can demonstrate in real life, that when we are flexible, we choose to cope with things that happen, even when those things feel unfair.

Teach and Model Problem-Solving Skills

When kids get stuck in a cycle of negative thinking about injustice, they can have difficulty accessing positive problem-solving skills. Wait until your child is calm and discuss possible alternatives to the situation so that he knows what to do if it (or something similar) happens again. Kids need a lot of input and practice when it comes to learning positive problem-solving skills to become flexible thinkers. Use role-play at home to practice coping with difficult social situations. If your child isn't big on acting, have him draw social stories showing step-by-step what happened and what he could have done differently.

Preparing children and young people to deal with an unfair and unjust world in a proactive, positive, and protective manner is one of the most important tasks we have. Think about it – if we can help foster more resilient children, the future of the world is certainly much brighter!

Exercises to Resiliently Cope with Unfairness

Acceptance Exercise

One way that you might practice resiliency is through acceptance and gratitude. One exercise is to call to mind an upsetting experience and list three positive things about it. For example, you might reflect on how fighting with a friend brought some important issues out into the open and allowed you to learn something about their point of view. Or, in a less intense scenario, if you burned a batch of cookies that you were going to make for a friend, you can remind yourself that you learned what to avoid in future when baking cookies, that you live somewhere where you have access to more ingredients to make another batch, and that you can always do another kind thing for your friend, like give them a call instead.

A 2014 study by Mongrain and Sergeant (2014) demonstrated that doing this practice daily for 3 weeks helped participants become more engaged with life afterward, and it decreased their pessimistic beliefs over time. This wasn't only true for a group whose members wrote about their daily activities. It was particularly beneficial for staunch pessimists, who also became less depressed. But the effects wore off after 2 months, suggesting that looking on the bright side is something we have to practice regularly.

Practicing Empathy for Oneself and Others

For this exercise, begin by coming to a comfortable seated or lying position. If you're seated, ensure that your spine is straight but not strained. If you're lying down, prop yourself up a little bit.

Take three deep breaths, counting 1-2-3 on the inhale and exhale. You can close your eyes if you'd like.

In your mind's eye, imagine a being that easily sparks a sense of love – maybe a partner, family member, or even a pet. Hold this being's image in your mind, and imagine showing them love. Maybe you envision showing them this love by giving them a hug or saying 'I love you.' Maybe you envision light from your heart center and connecting with that being. Whatever it is, hold that image and feeling in your head.

Keeping that same feeling of showing love, now imagine someone who you know well enough to send loving thoughts. Maybe a distant friend or co-worker – someone who you may see often but may be more of an acquaintance than a friend. Hold their image in your mind, and imagine sending them that same love.

Now, this part can sometimes feel tricky, but I encourage you to try it. Imagine that in your mind's eye the image shifts to a being to whom extending love may be a bit more difficult. Perhaps this is someone who gets on your nerves or even someone who has broken your 'rules.' Imagine extending love to this person in whatever way comes to you.

Finally, imagine yourself. Whatever comes to you is okay. Maybe it's you now – maybe a younger or even older version of yourself comes to you. Now direct the loving energy to yourself. Imagine sending yourself the same love that you have sent to all of these other beings. You, of all people, most deserve your own love.

Once you've practiced this enough in a quiet meditation style, you can even bring it with you as a tool when you're going about your day! For example, if you are in traffic or stopped walking to a destination, focus on the people around you and send them little bits of love just like you do in this exercise. Maybe give someone a smile or wave, or even just intentionally send them love in your mind. You'll find that many people will usually smile back or seem to 'receive' that love and send it right back, thus helping you to feel more connected. Plus, it'll help to make it easier to extend that love to yourself as well!

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3 Belief Is Half the Battle!

Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence

Many of my psychotherapy patients who I work with professionally tell me that they have low self-esteem. They are not happy with themselves or their lives. Many feel that they are not living the life they wanted, and feel poorly equipped to make the life they wanted happen. Many have been told that they are worthless or defective most of their lives. Many have been told that they do not deserve happiness and find their current negative situation to be more evidence of this. Self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence are all important components of living a good life. In Chapter 1, we discussed self-worth and how it is related to, but different from, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-confidence is another term that is thrown around a lot in this literature. This jumble of 'self-terms' can be confusing and so we will start by defining how we are using these terms and how they are related. Then we will talk about how to improve them!

When we talk about *self-efficacy,* we think of it as a person's belief in their ability to accomplish some specific goal or task. It generally corresponds to how competent an individual feels. Competence can vary from one situation to another, and thus, self-efficacy is typically thought of as what we call 'domain-specific.' For example, you may be very clear that you are good at writing, and thus have high self-efficacy about your writing skills, but may feel like you have much less ability in physics, and thus experience low self-efficacy in solving physics problems. Your level of self-efficacy is dependent on what subject area you are talking about – it is 'domain-specific.' Here is the good news! Self-efficacy is also changeable and responsive to learning and feedback from the environment. You can gain self-efficacy through practice and intentional and unintentional learning and through other modifiers from the environment around you – such as what other people say to you about your skills and abilities! This is why thinking about growing self-efficacy intentionally, even in children and young people, is so important!

One of the most famous researchers in the area of self-efficacy is Dr. Albert Bandura, who is now an emeritus professor of Social Science in Psychology at Stanford University. He helped demonstrate how self-efficacy impacts not only how you feel about yourself but also how successful you might be. Assessing self-efficacy is a bit tricky because it can pertain to a person's perception of their ability to deal with various specific situations or their overall ability. Fortunately, there are different versions of assessments of both specific self-efficacy and general self-efficacy. The New General Self-Efficacy Scale by Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001) assesses general self-efficacy in adults. Bandura's General Self-Efficacy Scale assesses perceived self-efficacy as it pertains to adaptation abilities and coping for both stressful events and daily activities (Romppel et al., 2013). This self-efficacy measure is a good one to start with because it is based upon Dr. Bandura's social-cognitive theory and evaluates ten functional areas of life (Panc, Mihalcea, & Panc, 2012): Intellectual, Family, Education, Professional, Social, Religious, Erotic, Moral, Well-being, and Health.

There are multiple other kinds of assessments of specific self-efficacy, such as for interpersonal communications of healthcare professionals, academic performance, athletic performance, cultural competence, versions for children and adolescents, aging individuals, you name it and there is an assessment for it!

When it comes right down to it, our belief in our own ability to succeed plays a key role in how we think and how we feel. It also helps us establish our place in the world and can even determine what kind of goals we set and how we go about accomplishing those goals.

Self-esteem is the regard or respect that a person has for themselves. A person with positive feelings regarding the self is said to have high self-esteem, one with negative feelings about the self has low self-esteem. Self-esteem is generally conceptualized as uniquely personal and specific and based on each individuals' own experiences. It is also thought of as domain-specific, similar to self-efficacy. As you can imagine, it can be related to self-efficacy, but is generally not thought of as exactly the same thing. At the turn of the 20th century, William James, who is often thought of as the 'father of American psychology,' defined self-esteem as the degree to which people perceive their accomplishments as consistent with their goals and aspirations (James, 1983). This is an interesting definition because if you think about this, this means that someone can be wealthy, beautiful, or well-liked by others and still not feel good about themselves – still not have positive self-esteem. The way others perceive us doesn't define our own self-esteem – it's how we perceive ourselves that matters. In the mid-1980s, Dr. Morris Rosenberg, a social psychologist and professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland until his death in 1992, extended this definition by adding that self-esteem involves feelings of self-acceptance, self-liking, and self-respect

(Rosenberg et al., 1995). These definitions can be applied to both global and domain-specific self-esteem. Global self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of himself or herself. Domain-specific self-evaluations focus on a specific facet of the self, such as physical appearance or academic competence. Dr. Rosenberg also developed the most popular assessment of self-esteem called the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which is a 10-item self-administered test (Rosenberg, 1965) that provides an overall number indicative of your own perceived self-esteem.

Thus, while self-efficacy is focused on 'doing' – for example, feeling that you are capable of attempting to achieve something, self-esteem is based on 'being' – for example, feeling that you are perfectly acceptable just as you are right now. The 'father of the self-esteem movement' in the U.S.A. is psychotherapist Dr. Nathaniel Branden. He defined self-esteem as a relationship between a person's perceived competence and their sense of worthiness, especially in regard to how one handles the challenges of living (Branden, 1995). He defined positive self-esteem as experiencing yourself as competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and as worthy of happiness. Dr. Branden proposed that, while others (parents, teachers, friends) can nurture and support self-esteem in another person, self-esteem also relies upon various internally generated practices of the individual. Thus, he proposed that self-esteem is impacted by both others and the self.

Dr. Roy Baumeister, a professor at Queensland University in Australia is a social psychologist who has studied self-esteem for decades. Dr. Baumeister warns of the importance of not confusing self-esteem with self-confidence (Baumeister et al., 2003). 'Self-esteem is, literally, how favorably a person regards him or herself,' Baumeister writes. 'High self-esteem can mean confident and secure – but it can also mean conceited, arrogant, narcissistic, and egotistical' (Baumeister, 1996, p. 14). We can think of self-confidence as a kind of trust or assertion in yourself, believing in your own aptitude or ability either generally or in a specific area or domain. You might even think of self-confidence as self-assurance. Self-efficacy is positively related to self-confidence, but they are not the same thing; in the words of psychologist Albert Bandura, Ph.D., the originator of the theoretical construct of self-efficacy and of social cognitive therapy:

> Confidence is a nondescript term that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about… Perceived self-efficacy refers to belief in one's agentive capabilities, that one can produce given levels of attainment. (1997, p. 382)

Just as positive self-esteem can increase motivation; self-efficacy and confidence can work in a positive cycle: the more confident a person is in their abilities, the more likely they are to succeed, which provides them with experiences to develop self-efficacy. This high self-efficacy, in turn, can increase confidence!

It is important to realize that in this area of research there are many related but slightly different terms and ideas and each one may have its own distinct body of research and findings that may or may not be related to other areas. Thus, you may need to explore multiple areas of research in order to have a comprehensive understanding of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-confidence (Mruk, 2006). The literature is vast in this domain and it can be challenging to translate findings from one researcher to another. With that caveat, there are a few general findings that seem to persist across time and cultures. Specifically, data appear to demonstrate that people worldwide tend to gain self-esteem as they grow older, and that men generally have higher levels of self-esteem than women. Although this self-esteem gender gap is more pronounced in Western industrialized countries, the general trend across all the countries suggests that gender and age differences in self-esteem are not a Western idiosyncrasy, but can be observed in different cultures across the world (Bleidorn et al., 2016). The hope is that as we learn more about what influences and shapes self-esteem and self-efficacy, we can better understand why women world-wide seem to have lower self-esteem than men across the lifespan. Then we can focus on improving our theories and more importantly, designing programs and interventions to promote or protect healthy self-esteem for us all!

Kim and Morgan's Story

I will never forget the mid-Spring afternoon I picked up Morgan from after-school when she was in third grade. She was quiet and her head was down. She was not her normal silly, happy, talkative self. She climbed into the car and sat in the back seat, looking down at her feet, and then once in a while glancing out the window. She looked tearful and sad. I waited a bit, after greeting her with a 'Hi Sweetie! How was your day? It is so good to see you!' She was quiet for a long time as we drove. Then she finally blurted out that she was going to fail third grade and started sobbing. I was dumbfounded, and pulled the car over into a parking lot. I stopped and climbed into the back seat with her and held her. Then I asked what this was all about. Morgan became less tearful and more obviously anxious. I told her it was all going to be OK, but asked again, why she thought she was going to fail third grade? I knew that her grades seemed to be fine and she was getting along well socially in school. She told me that her math teacher informed her that she was not good at math and that if she didn't improve, she would be held back. I was shocked. I was shocked not so much by the idea of her being held back, especially since she was young for her grade, but mainly I was shocked that a third grade teacher would say this to her! I saw the damage it did to her self-concept and her idea about her math abilities.

Morgan did not fail third grade, but she did suffer regarding her own math skills, and would often indicate verbally that she 'was not good at math' and would stop trying to solve a math problem at the first frustration. Soon the statement that her teacher made became almost a self-fulfilling prophecy. Morgan had been told she was not good at math and so she became not good at math. Her imposed self-concept became a reality and she had low self-efficacy for math skills. I think her self-esteem suffered as well and I know that her self-confidence in her ability to do math plummeted. Although her father and I tried to help her understand that the ability to do math is a skill that can be learned and not a fixed trait, the damage had been done. I am still mad at that third grade teacher, and often wonder how many children, especially girls, have been shut down early by thoughtless teachers, tutors, and coaches who told them they are intrinsically not 'good' at something, like math or science or sports.

Interestingly, after this event, I began looking into research about self-esteem and children and found to my shock that for girls in the U.S.A., their self-esteem peaks when they are 9 years old, and steadily declines from there (Goodman et al., 2004)! I also discovered that there is a vast and varied body of research on self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence, gender, ethnicity, body image, trauma, sports, education, intelligence, and on and on. The literature is expansive and confusing because of the variation of terms and concepts. The main theme was that these are very popular topics for psychologists and educators to study and for good reason – self-efficacy and self-esteem can have a huge impact on just about everything from psychological states to motivation to behavior. Our belief in our own ability to succeed plays a key role in how we think and how we feel now and in the future. It also helps us establish our place in the world and can even determine what kind of goals we set and how we go about accomplishing those goals.

Other themes from the literature support that if you have strong self-efficacy you may:

- View challenging problems as simply another task to be mastered
- Develop a deeper interest in the activities you participate in
- Form a stronger sense of commitment to your activities and interests and
- Recover more quickly when it comes to disappointments and setbacks

And if you have low self-efficacy you may:

- Avoid challenging tasks
- Believe that difficult tasks or situations are beyond your capability
- Focus on negative outcomes or personal failures and
- Lose confidence quickly in your personal abilities

Thus, understanding and cultivating your own healthy self-efficacy and self-esteem are important life goals!

Importance of Self-Efficacy

As we have stated, self-efficacy refers to your belief in your ability to complete the tasks required for achieving a particular goal (Bandura, 1997). Dr. Albert Bandura, a psychologist at Stanford University who helped develop the construct of self-efficacy, proposed that self-efficacy beliefs are the most powerful influence on a person's decision to begin and maintain a behavior. Self-efficacy determines how we think and feel about ourselves. It is a kind of confidence in ourselves that is different from pure ability. For example, I worked with a student who aspired to become an engineer, but she was not sure about her engineering or academic potentials. She put in the effort, worked hard, and did her very best, but at the end of the day, she was still unhappy because she lacked confidence in herself. When she succeeded, she attributed it to luck and when she did not do as well, it supported her doubt in herself. What she needed was to build her self-efficacy in order to increase her trust in herself.

Sense of self is generally thought of as a product of two interacting forces that can be described as nature and nurture. Nature is what we are born with and nurture is the influence of the environment around us, including other people. Early in life, our sense of our own self may be heavily influenced by our environment and by others as well as by our inherent personalities and traits. A great example of the impact of inborn personality early in life is the idea of the personality construct of agreeableness, which is one of the five major dimensions of personality structure according to many psychologists (McCrae & Costa, 2003). This dimension reflects pretty much what you would expect given its name. 'Agreeableness' refers to the level of individual differences in cooperation and social harmony. People who score high on this dimension are empathetic and altruistic, while a low agreeableness score relates to selfish behavior and a lack of empathy (Bamford & Davidson, 2017; Song & Shi, 2017).

The thing with inborn characteristics is that they work in concert with the environment, so that who you are then interacts with others in your social environment for better or worse. One example in my early life illustrates an interesting impact of these differences. During one Halloween, when I was very young – I think I was no more than 5 or 6 years old – my mother brought home two costumes for my younger sister and me to wear to go trick-or-treating. Our mother worked during the day as a nurse and my father was in his residency training for surgery which meant he worked all the time. Mom did not have time to get fancy with the costumes, so these were simple jumpsuit type things of solid color along with a paper face mask. We each got the suit that fit us – mine a bright cheerful yellow that came with a princess mask and hers a purple suit with a cat mask. I was thrilled and excited to trick or treat, and started dancing around (something I frequently did as an expression of positive emotion!). My sister watched me, but instead of mirroring my enthusiasm, she was very unhappy. She pouted and told my mother that she wanted the princess mask! Mom was probably fatigued and wanting to just get on with it, so she asked me if I would switch with my sister. I said sure! I would love to be a cat! We swapped masks and I again began to dance around, but this time, like a cat! I looked over at my sister to meow at her, and she was still frowning. Turns out, being a cat didn't suit her either. She was going to be unhappy it seemed, no matter what. What my mother told me later, was that as an agreeable child, others were more supportive and engaging with me. She told me stories of how I was easy to be around, and thus, people approached me with opportunities, positive feedback, and friendship. Less agreeable children may elicit opposite reactions from others, and then may internalize those reactions and may miss out on growth experiences or positive relationships. The relationship of nature and nurture seems to augment and play off of each other – low agreeableness endears less support or positive feedback from the environment and high agreeableness grows support and encouragement and more agreeableness.

Thus, you can see how personality and sense of self can interact with the environment and impact self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Additionally, self-efficacy can interact with a sense of self. We know that increased self-efficacy enhances self-control. It impacts all aspects of human functioning – including social interactions, health, emotional well-being, and professional work. General self-efficacy affects how individuals react during times of stress exposure (Bavojdan, Towhidi, & Rahmati, 2011). General self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in their ability to cope with stress and even appears to be related to a lower risk of mortality, although this may be true only for certain groups of people. For instance, low general self-efficacy does not appear to increase mortality risks for blacks but does for whites (Assari, 2017).

Self-efficacy influences our thoughts, emotions, actions, and motivation. We start contributing to our beliefs about our own self-efficacy in early childhood with experiences of ourselves, watching and learning from others, and being informed about ourselves by others' reactions to us. Positive feelings like autonomy, love, support, safety, and encouragement act as catalysts to our self-efficacy. Self-efficacy operates on how we think and feel and thus, plays a crucial role in shaping our view of life experiences. Many contemporary mental health interventions largely rely on promoting well-being by improving self-efficacy. Since self-efficacy affects almost every aspect of our well-being, many psychologists argue that it is vital to help people intentionally increase their self-efficacy. Bandura proposed that we can think of self-efficacy as having multiple sources that feed it – both internal to the person and external to the person (Bandura, 1997). Internal forces that impact self-efficacy include our own internal resilience and experiences of trying and failing and trying and succeeding in a task, as well as becoming aware of our own emotional and physical state of mind. Learning lessons from watching others and modeling experiences of others are some of the external components that impact self-efficacy. Knowing what influences self-efficacy, allows us to generate ideas about how to increase it.

Building Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), there are four major sources that contribute to the development of self-efficacy beliefs:

- Performance accomplishments: This is the experience of mastery. Successful experiences lead to greater feelings of self-efficacy. However, failing to deal with a task or challenge can also undermine and weaken self-efficacy.
- Vicarious experience: Observing someone else perform a task or handle a situation can help you to perform the same task by imitation, and if you succeed in performing a task, you are likely to think that you will succeed as well, if the task is not too difficult. Observing people who are similar to yourself succeed will increase your beliefs that you can master a similar activity
- Verbal persuasion: When other people encourage and convince you to perform a task, you tend to believe that you are more capable of performing the task. Constructive feedback is important in maintaining a sense of efficacy and it may help overcome self-doubt
- Physiological states: Moods, emotions, physical reactions, and stress levels may influence how you feel about your personal abilities. If you are extremely nervous, you may begin to doubt and develop a weak sense of self-efficacy. If you are confident and feel no anxiety or nervousness you may experience a sense of excitement that fosters a great sense of self-efficacy. It is the way people interpret and evaluate emotional states that is important for how they develop self-efficacy beliefs. For this reason, being able to diminish or control anxiety may have a positive impact on self-efficacy beliefs

Self-efficacy beliefs begin to form in early childhood as the child deals with a variety of experiences, tasks, and situations. The development of self-efficacy beliefs continues throughout life as people learn, experience, and develop into more complex human beings. We may form perceptions about ourselves by comparing ourselves with others. However, research by Steyn and Mynhardt (2008) shows that the development of self-efficacy beliefs seems to be more influenced by mastery experiences than information formed by social comparisons. But, for many people the mastery of performance (first on the list above) is the most challenging. For this reason, we will focus on helping to increase beliefs in the ability to set goals and achieve them! If we intentionally approach experiences with realistic goals in mind and clear intentions, we may be able to increase our self-efficacy.

Setting realistic and attainable goals is an important step in building self-efficacy. It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to intentionally and proactively identify your goals! Many patients who I work with have low self-efficacy, depression, anxiety, and very unhappy and lonely lives because they have never thought about their goals. They live life merely reacting to others and thus, at the mercy of others – with no confidence in themselves and no self-efficacy. The first step to increasing self-efficacy is to give yourself permission to think about and set goals for yourself in the world. These can start off by being very pragmatic and straightforward goals like, 'I want to invite my friend to have coffee.' These goals need to be realistic and attainable, meaning that you can reasonably have control over them and that the environment is likely able to provide or produce the goal. For example, a goal of wanting to play piano like a concert pianist is not realistic if you do not know how to play the piano, but the goal of wanting to take piano lessons is realistic and most likely attainable. The goal of wanting other people to feel, think, or do specific things just because you want them to is also unrealistic and unattainable because we cannot make others feel, think, or do things. This goal is especially unrealistic if we are counting on other people to read our minds or know what we want. Even when we directly ask for what we want, we might not get the other person to do it. We do not have that kind of control over others. What we can control is what we do, think, say, and pay attention to. Thus, setting goals that are realistic and attainable and yet still meaningful and in line with your values is the first important step to building self-efficacy. You can set goals based on what you would like to do, what you are good at, or you can set goals that are new and challenging to you. You then work in a systematic way to gear your thoughts and interpretations as well as your behaviors toward achieving these goals. This is sometimes called 'means-end thinking' because you are focused on what it will take to facilitate achievement of the goal. You set a realistic goal, focus on what it takes to work toward that goal and often (but not always), you may find that you achieve it, and you will certainly increase your self-efficacy.

Means-end thinking in the education literature is described as the ability to orient oneself to and conceptualize the means of moving toward a goal (Beveridge & Goh, 1987). This ability is thought to develop in adolescence and is generally deemed necessary for adequate social adjustment. People who operate using means-end thinking have been shown to be more able to set and achieve interpersonal goals and be successful in their interpersonal interactions (Kleftaras, 2000). Interestingly, means-end thinking is also an important aspect of intelligent behavior as studied in Artificial Intelligence (AI) where it is described as a kind of goal-based problem-solving skill, a framework in which the solution to a problem can be described by finding a sequence of actions that lead to a desirable goal. In AI, a goal-seeking system is connected to its outside environment by sensory channels through which it receives information about the environment and motor channels through which it acts on the environment. This is very similar to how means-end thinking is hypothesized to work in humans. A major problem is that many humans do not learn to operate this way. They never learn how to set relevant, realistic, attainable goals, or they learn that it is not OK to do so. In other words, they receive information from the environment and act on the environment, but do not have a priori realistic goals in mind. Thus, these individuals end up just reacting to things and people around them and essentially give their power away to others by being at the mercy of the environment and other people. Additionally, some people learn that they will be ridiculed, dissuaded, thwarted, or punished for setting goals. They learn that setting goals for themselves is not allowed or not safe or not possible. Others have never seen goals set by those around them, and thus, they do not learn to think about goal setting. They may operate day-to-day in a purely reactionary mode, reacting to their environment with little thought or effort regarding their own goals. These individuals will be at the mercy of the environment and those around them – which may ultimately result in no goal setting and a subsequent absence of self-efficacy.

An example of what can happen when you do not practice means-end thinking comes from a depressed female patient I worked with. Phyllis was a 58-year-old divorced baseball fan. During one group therapy session, Phyllis reported on a situation where she was invited to a work colleague's home to watch a baseball game on TV with a group of other people. Phyllis enjoyed baseball and was lonely and so accepted the invitation. She did not set a goal for herself and was very anxious on her way to her colleague's home. Phyllis almost turned around several times, but managed to get to the person's home and went up to the door. Her colleague, Tammy, greeted her and invited her in and they all sat to watch the game. Phyllis was still anxious and reported that in retrospect, she was not clear what to do or how long to stay and never thought about her goals or what she hoped to achieve. One man, Jake, asked her who she was cheering for and she let him know the team she hoped would win and he teased her about her team's losing streak. She felt her face flush and her confusion, embarrassment, and panic rise and she quickly left the room. Tammy came and found Phyllis and told her that Jake was like that with everyone – he was a joker and most people just ignored him or laughed it off – she said Jake was just teasing. Phyllis could not take this information in; she was feeling panicky and ended up slipping out of the house after pretending to go to the restroom. She felt so ashamed after the episode that she never responded to her friend's follow-up calls, and lost a group of potential acquaintances and friends.

After Phyllis shared this story, the group discussed how she might have approached things differently using means-end thinking. We explored what a realistic and attainable goal might look like for her in this situation. Other group members helped her think about her goals and she also was reminded to think about her values. In other words, she was encouraged to think literally about what she wanted to do during the visit to her friend's home and to think about how it fit with her values – what was important to her. Ultimately, the group came up with several options, each dependent on the individual and their goals. Phyllis decided that she could have set an original goal of staying for a certain period of time, and we discussed how this may have changed after the comment from Jake. She was able to explore how she may have been able to set an additional goal to clarify with Jake what he meant, or to ignore Jake's comment, or to even laugh at Jake's comment. These were much more challenging ideas for her to consider, and she was not sure that she had the skills yet to pull them off, but she at least knew that there were other options for the situation. She also knew that having an anchor of a specific goal that she was trying to achieve would help her focus and that knowing her values and what is important to her would help guide how she achieved this goal. For example, she stated that leaving without saying goodbye did not fit with her values. She had felt badly about leaving without letting her friends know and this bothered her the most. Phyllis was eventually able to forgive herself because she understood more fully what happened in the situation and how having a goal in mind next time may help facilitate a more successful outcome.

Learning means-end thinking is a fabulous way to develop skills to help build self-efficacy. In means-ends analysis, the problem solver begins by envisioning the end, or ultimate goal, and then determines the best strategy for attaining the goal. As we have stated, the goal is more achievable if it is realistic and attainable. Means-end thinking is crucial for adequate social functioning and can be practiced in most interactions where goals are set. It is important ahead of time to think about and set realistic and attainable goals and evaluate if they need to change over time.

Focusing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward the achievement of these goals will really help facilitate achievement in a reliable manner. This does not mean that the goal is always met, but it does mean that the person has a clearly articulated goal for the specific situation and is actively generating and acting on components that will potentially help move them toward the goal. Thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that do not work toward these goals or are not relevant or helpful in moving toward these goals can be laid aside, and thus reduce unnecessary emotional, behavioral, or interpersonal distractions or disruptions toward goal achievement. It is important to be clear about the goal and determine if it is something you have control over or not, as well as determine if this is the actual goal you want to focus on at this particular moment. If you do not have success in achieving the goal, or communication is not effective, you can then examine the goal and determine if it is really the goal that you want to pursue at this moment. Often people have goals that are not realistic, not attainable, or not appropriate for the specific situation, and this will cause difficulties. It is important to set goals for the situation that are appropriate. For example, for a surgeon, a goal of letting hospital administrators know how she is unhappy about the call schedule is not the most appropriate goal while she is actively in the middle of performing surgery on a patient, because her immediate goal is to perform a safe and effective surgery, but it may become an appropriate goal after the surgery is complete.

It can be easy to forget to set realistic or attainable goals in situations. In our busy, rushed world it can be especially easy to fall into a pattern of reacting to others instead of thoughtfully developing a realistic and relevant goal for yourself based on what is important to you. This puts an individual at risk for reacting to others instead of responding intentionally and working toward a valued and appropriate goal. People may set goals that are not realistic or attainable and these need to be acknowledged and revised. A helpful thing to do is to intentionally think about what your goal is prior to entering into an interaction and then explore in your own mind if this is something that you think you can control and that the environment can reasonably produce. If this is not the case, think about what is the next most important, urgent, and achievable goal in the situation and work toward that end. You can also think about your own values and what is important to you personally about the interaction or situation and use this information to help set your goals. In a later chapter, we will talk more about the important role of personal values and how to identify them if you do not already know what they are.

When you begin to operate in a fashion where you are intentionally setting realistic and attainable goals based on your values, and forming your interpretations, thoughts, and behaviors toward facilitating the achievement of these goals, and perhaps even achieving your goals and understanding your role in it – this is self-efficacy! Bingo! It feels good and can help increase your confidence and self-worth! In fact, the premise of this idea of means-end thinking informs a proven effective psychotherapy for persistent depression called Cognitive Behavioral Analysis System of Psychotherapy (CBASP), which was developed by clinical psychologist Dr. Jim McCullough, Jr., who also happens to have been the mentor of one of the authors of this book – Kim! This therapy helps promote what is termed ‘perceived functionality’ in the depressed patient, significantly improving symptoms of depression (McCullough et al., 2015; Penberthy, 2019).

So, to summarize, below are steps you can use to implement means-end thinking and help improve your self-efficacy:

1. Set a relevant, realistic, and attainable goal
2. Check the goal against your values – does it fit with your values and your mission? If not, you may wish to re-evaluate your goal
3. Generate and gear your thoughts, interpretations, and behaviors toward facilitation of your goal
4. If a thought, feeling, or behavior does not help move toward the goal, set it aside and do not focus on it. It will still be there, but it does not help get to your goal
5. Focus on your goal and remind yourself of how your thoughts, interpretations, and behavior facilitate achievement of the goal and the values related to the goal
6. When and if you achieve your goal or get near it, own your part in making it happen
7. If you do not achieve your goal, you may wish to explore why, including asking yourself if the goal was realistic and attainable and if something else may have changed during the event, interaction, or situation
8. Regardless of the outcome, if you are clear about your goals and they are realistic and attainable and you understand your role in the event, then you have made progress by being intentional and adding to your learning

One of the most significant qualities of people with high self-efficacy is the power to look beyond short-term losses and not let such losses break their trust in themselves and their goals – this is called being resilient! Not achieving your goal can be a rich learning opportunity because it allows you to examine what part of the process did not help facilitate the goal, or if the goal was not realistic or attainable. In using the means-end approach you can also clarify your values and sort priorities, and this leads to making better plans, setting meaningful goals that fit with your values, and focusing on your goals more efficiently. A related practical psychological tool that you can use with means-end thinking to increase self-efficacy is to intentionally identify unhelpful thoughts, assumptions or other obstacles to your goals, and reframe or replace them with more adaptive interpretations. Reconstructing the way we look at failures can help change the way we think of ourselves. For example, a person with high self-efficacy is not likely to perceive a loss as a personal shortcoming. In the example of Phyllis, this might look like Phyllis responding to joking or rude comments with a clear idea that there is nothing wrong with her. She might then think about what her goals and values are and set a goal to ask for clarification or a goal to let it go or a goal to be kind. She might try to cope with it and find ways to handle it positively. Building self-efficacy allows us to understand that challenges and failures are inevitable and that by continuing to believe in ourselves and our abilities, we work toward our goals and attain fulfillment anyway.

Building Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the regard we have for ourselves and as we mentioned, it is a bit different than self-efficacy. It is being pleased with or comfortable with yourself as you are. Both self-efficacy and self-esteem have been extensively studied, and one of the clinicians who has done a good deal of this work is Dr. Nathaniel Branden. He has built a career studying self-esteem and strategies to help increase it. Dr. Branden distinguishes his approach to self-esteem from that of others by his inclusion of both confidence and worth in his definition of self-esteem. In the mid-1990s, he developed a framework of six 'pillars' of self-esteem (Branden,1995). As you recall, self-esteem differs from self-efficacy in that it is focused on 'being' and less on 'doing.' Thus, it is less connected to achievement of goals. The first pillar according to Dr. Branden is living consciously – that is being in the moment and being mindful. In his books on growing self-esteem, Dr. Branden also describes the necessity of self-acceptance, self-responsibility, and self-assertiveness practices as well as something quite familiar to the reader by now – the importance of setting goals and developing a plan of action to achieve the goals. Finally, he proposes that the sixth pillar is personal integrity – similar to what we might think of as living your values. Dr. Branden thinks of self-esteem as an active practice and states that what determines the level of self-esteem is what the individual does. Thus, in his writings and his work as a psychotherapist, he proposes active exercises people can do to address each of the pillars. He focuses a great deal on a written practice called 'sentence-completion' to promote conscious, mindful living, and increase self-understanding. The sentence-completion exercise is deceptively simple, yet uniquely powerful in raising self-understanding, self-esteem, and personal effectiveness according to Dr. Branden. This exercise rests on the premise that all of us have more knowledge than we normally are aware of, more wisdom than we use, and more potential than typically shows up in our behavior. Branden proposes that sentence completion is a tool for accessing and activating these 'hidden resources.' The basic idea is that you have a sentence stem like 'Living mindfully to me means ...' and you then create several completions of that sentence. The only rule is that each ending needs to create a sentence.

You may want to give this a try yourself with different sentence stems that seem pertinent. Some examples may be:

- If I could accept myself, then…
- The feeling of responsibility makes me…
- If I let others know how I feel…
- If I was kinder to myself…

You can see how you can create sentences for each of the six pillars that are specific to you and your current situation. This allows for people to work on multiple pillars simultaneously. Overall, Dr. Branden promotes that active practices of mindfulness, self-acceptance, and ownership in the form of self-responsibility for choices and actions lead to increased self-esteem. He also promotes the active practice of self-assertiveness with a focus on being authentic and real and equates this pillar to self-actualization. Branden's fifth pillar of living purposefully is very similar to the idea of means-end thinking with a focus on setting goals that resonate with your values and ideals and thinking about what it will take to achieve those goals. Finally, Dr. Branden proposes that without personal integrity, all other practices will fail. He describes integrity as an integration of ideals, convictions, standards, values, and behavior and states that when our behavior matches these values, this is integrity. These intentional practices lead to increased self-esteem according to Dr. Branden (1995).

Additional Research

Research shows that self-efficacy beliefs are associated with beneficial aspects of human functioning. The belief that one can control stressful events is related to emotional well-being, successful coping, positive health behaviors, better performance on cognitive tasks, and good health. Self-efficacy beliefs have even been linked to a lower risk of mortality (Taylor, 2011). There are numerous research studies showing that self-efficacy beliefs help determine whether people choose to attempt certain tasks, how they attempt the tasks, and how they cope with challenges arising from trying to complete the task – that is the degree of anxiety and frustration they experience in the process.

Poor self-efficacy beliefs have been found related to clinical problems such as phobias (Bandura, 1983), addiction (Marlat et al., 1995), depression (Davis & Yates, 1982), social skills (Moe & Zeiss, 1982), assertiveness (Lee, 1984); to stress in a variety of contexts (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995); to smoking behavior (Garcia et al., 1990); to pain control (Manning & Wright, 1983); to health (O'Leary, 1985); and to athletic performance (Barling & Abel, 1983). For example, researchers Pajares and Urdan (2006) showed that self-efficacy predicts academic performance in adolescents, and Brown and Lent (2006) demonstrated that self-efficacy predicts students' college major and career choices. In their 2008 review of the literature since 1977 on the sources of self-efficacy in school, Usher and Pajares (2008) observed that self-efficacy is 'associated with key motivational constructs such as causal attributions, self-concept, optimism, achievement goal orientation, academic help-seeking, anxiety, and value' (p. 751).

Research suggests that academic performance in general is related to one's perceived self-efficacy. Tuckman and Sexton (1992) suggest that students with higher self-efficacy are better at searching for new solutions and are more persistent at working on difficult tasks, whereas people with low self-efficacy give up more easily when dealing with difficult tasks and cannot concentrate on tasks as well. These patterns of behavior, if they continue, lead to the development of different levels of actual ability, which results in increased levels of achievement. Self-efficacy affects every area of human endeavor. By determining the beliefs a person holds regarding their power to affect situations, it strongly influences both the power a person actually has to face challenges competently and the choices a person makes.

Low self-efficacy beliefs and low self-esteem are serious issues that can have significant and long-term negative effects on a person's life. So, please, please, please take steps today and every day to strengthen your belief in yourself! You can also take daily action to help improve the self-esteem of your loved ones. If you already have a strong belief in your ability, remind yourself that you can do it. If you're uncertain about your capacity for success, tell yourself that you can do it. If you're positive that there is no way you could achieve the goal you set for yourself or overcome the obstacle in your path, give yourself a stern but encouraging pep talk ('You can do it!'). We know that a person's belief in their own abilities is a strong predictor of motivation, effort expended, and success; there is no downside to encouraging yourself, and working on believing in yourself. As Henry Ford is credited with saying, 'Whether you think you can or you can't – you're right.' So what happens when we think that we can?

Morgan's Story

I don't remember a whole lot about the day that my third grade teacher told me I'd be held back because of my poor performance in math class, but I do remember regularly telling myself after that moment that I was stupid and that there was no point in trying to understand or master math as a subject. Instead of tackling math head-on, I wanted to delve deeper into other topics that I felt I was good at – things like English and history and art – and excel in those areas to the best of my ability. Thankfully, I have a supportive (and rather stern) mother, who insisted that I learn math and was willing to do anything she could to help boost my self-confidence in my mathematical abilities. With the help of her and my father's support, hours spent with my math tutor, and positive self-talk around my ability to do well in math, I not only made it through third grade – I even made my way through advanced research methods and statistics classes to earn a bachelor's degree in psychology! While I was able to work through and conquer this belief that I was bad at math, my battle with self-confidence and efficacy are never truly over, and there have been many instances in which I've struggled to embrace self-confidence.

For example, while co-writing this book, I also held down a full-time job and spent the remaining hours of my time outside of work studying for the GRE for admission into graduate school. I selected a GRE study program that was heavily focused on math since I had been out of college for a few years, and felt that a re-introduction to some of the basic academic mathematical concepts might help to boost my score on the math section of the test. One Sunday morning, I had spent about an hour studying the verbal sections. Once I flipped to the next section, a pop quiz appeared on some of the math principles we'd covered earlier in the module. I felt so frustrated when I took a longer time to understand and answer the questions and ended up getting many of them incorrect! Flustered and disheartened, I began questioning my ability to understand and perform well in the math sections. I felt that I wasn't smart enough to do the math questions correctly, which tempted me to simply give up and give in to my belief that I was never destined to perform well on math exercises.

Right when I felt like completely giving up on learning these concepts, I took a few deep breaths and reminded myself that this was just *one moment* – a moment in which I could choose to believe the false idea that I'm terminally bad at math or to believe in my ability to persevere. Never one to back out of a challenge, I chose to believe in myself. I reminded myself that I am not terminally bad at math and gently took a step back from the math quiz, focusing on what I am able to do and how I can control my reactions and beliefs about my math abilities. I took a walk, had some food and coffee, and called my mom (three things that will almost always make me feel calmer). I reminded myself that I am capable of anything and that my aversion to math and quick angry reactions were simply manifestations of my long-held belief that I'm intrinsically not smart enough to perform well in math, which in part stem from those biting words from my third grade teacher. I didn't have to latch on to them then, and I still don't have to latch on to them now – I choose to believe in my abilities to learn and grow and to dismantle the belief that I can't be better at math. Even on my most difficult days, like that one Sunday, I can choose to believe in myself and establish self-efficacy – and you can, too!

What You Can Do Now

To enhance your own self-efficacy, focus on ensuring that you have the opportunities you need to master difficult skills and complete challenging tasks. You can do this by setting goals and approaching them – find positive role models, listen to the encouraging and motivating people in your life, and take care of your own mental health.

According to Bandura, you develop your self-efficacy beliefs based on how you interpret input that you receive from four sources: mastery of experiences, modeling behavior, verbal persuasion, and physiological factors. This means that if you want to increase your self-efficacy beliefs in any area, you need to find a way to work within these four areas. Below are some strategies recapped in each domain.

Performance Accomplishments/Mastery Experiences

- This is the experience of mastery. This is one of the most powerful areas you can intentionally impact. You can use your means-end thinking previously described to build up these experiences
- As part of your means-end thinking, you can set goals that have an element of challenge in them but that are also realistic and attainable
- You can also set smaller goals for yourself and work your way up slowly, especially if you have beliefs related to past failures. Make sure to recognize and celebrate even small successes
- Remember that setbacks are normal and be kind and compassionate toward yourself
- You can also think of your past successes. Remembering how you achieved something that you at first thought was difficult can be helpful

Vicarious Experience

- This is learning by observing someone else perform a task or handle a situation. Watching someone else can help you to perform the same task by imitation. Observing people succeed will increase your beliefs that you can master a similar activity
- An interesting finding in the research is that for this to work, you need to perceive that the people whom you see succeeding in achieving the goal that you're after are similar to you (Bandura, 1997). They can be friends, family, or even someone who you do not know, but they need to be someone comparable to you – like a role model. In other words, watching a world class chess master play chess will not help increase chess-playing self-efficacy for someone who knows nothing about the game. The idea is to find someone who will make you think that if they can do it, so can you

Verbal Persuasion

- This is when other people encourage or convince you to try something. When other people encourage and convince you to perform a task, you tend to believe that you are more capable of performing the task. Constructive feedback is important in maintaining a sense of efficacy and it may help overcome self-doubt
- You want to be around people who will encourage you to go after your dreams and who will cheer you on as you strive to achieve your goals. You need cheerleaders who can also provide constructive feedback
- You want to avoid people who tell you that you cannot achieve your goals or that you should not try things. These kinds of people will have a negative impact on your self-efficacy
- If you don't currently have a supportive network of positive and encouraging people in your life, then try reading daily affirmations and journaling to remind yourself that you can succeed. There are many sources of positive reflections and daily devotionals with inspirational readings! Use these

Physiological and Emotional States

- These are the physical reactions, stress, and associated emotions that influence how you feel about your personal abilities
- The emotional state that you're in when it's time to act on your goals will affect your self-efficacy
- It is important to recognize this and control what you can about this. You may not be able to control a fast beating heart when you try something challenging, but you can control what you tell yourself about that physiological reaction. Instead of interpreting it as a negative or frightening thing, you can interpret it as a sign of excitement at the prospect of stepping outside of your comfort zone. This excitement will encourage us to keep moving forward
- Positive moods increase feelings of self-efficacy, while negative moods reduce it. Strive to put yourself in moods that will boost your self-efficacy by managing stress, and by talking yourself through any discomfort you may feel as you strive to achieve your goals. If you suffer from physical or mental illness, take action to address it and seek help! Taking care of your physical and mental illness will help increase your self-efficacy

What You Can Do to Help a Young Person

If you have a young person in your life, you have a wonderful opportunity to help increase their self-efficacy beliefs and potentially help them increase their self-esteem, confidence and live a successful life!

- Identify realistic goals and work toward mastering them. You can use the means-end thinking with children to help them link their efforts and intentions to the outcomes in order to increase the feeling of mastery. A sense of mastery is when a child truly feels they grasp the subject or task at hand. It happens when a child equates success to something they can control. For example, they may think, 'I got a good grade on my test because I studied hard,' or 'I did not get a good grade on the test because I did not study.' Mastery reinforces stronger self-efficacy beliefs. In contrast, a child does not develop a sense of mastery when they equate success to something that is out of their control. Thus, helping the child set goals that are realistic and that they can influence and helping the child link their efforts to the outcomes is a very powerful way to increase their self-efficacy beliefs. Ideally, tasks need to be challenging enough to keep the child's interest, but not so difficult that they become frustrating. Overcoming smaller challenges builds a child's resilience when encountering more challenging tasks; instead of feeling anxious, the child is more likely to persist
- Provide vicarious experiences. You can model how to construct a goal during a task, and approach it systematically. Don't forget that social learning theory proposes that children and young people learn a great deal via observation – so remember to provide positive examples! You can model a task for a young person in your life and provide a wonderful and positive learning experience to help increase their self-efficacy beliefs
- Praise efforts instead of ability. Giving messages about a child's capabilities and skills to handle challenging tasks greatly influence a child's willingness to persist during setbacks. Verbal encouragement is most helpful when it is focused on the efforts of the young person and are specific. Empty self-esteem boosters like 'You can do anything!' do not promote self-efficacy. In fact, the results of a large-scale study (Margolis & McCabe, 2006) showed that 'ability' praises such as 'You are intelligent' actually induced a fear of failure, causing children to avoid challenging situations. Praising ability undermined both motivation and performance. In contrast, children in the study who were praised for effort and encouraged to try regardless of the outcome, demonstrated more effort and increased self-efficacy

Exercises to Increase Self-Efficacy

Recognizing Your Effort

When practicing building self-efficacy, it may be tempting to start thinking about what you feel like you can – or can't – do. This is something commonly seen in yoga practice, and especially in beginners. For example, if you're a beginner yogi, you may have a goal of mastering

Padangusthasana, or Big Toe Pose, which is expressed by folding forward and holding the big toes with the pointer finger and thumb. It may feel easy for you to tell yourself, ‘I can’t do that – I’m not flexible enough,’ or, ‘I can bend forward, so I’ll ace this pose!’ Neither of these approaches will benefit you because they focus on ability, not effort. If you assume automatically that you will be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ at something and base your goals on your perceived ability, you’ll limit yourself – instead of practicing gentle curiosity, and you’ll quit before you’ve even tried! Instead of approaching the goal with an ability-focused lens, try approaching it with gentle curiosity. Ask yourself, ‘Let’s see how this goes if I try.’ Try focusing on the effort you can put in to reach your goal – that way, whether you fully express the pose on your first try or your 47th class, you’ll be able to recognize the effort you put in. Follow the below steps to practice this gentle curiosity:

1. Think about a goal you have in mind. Keep it specific and realistic. This can be anything you want to achieve! (Examples: Play ‘Yankee Doodle’ on the guitar or floss teeth once a day)
2. Write your goal down somewhere you’ll see every day. This can be on a sticky note on your mirror, in a daily journal, or even a note or reminder on your phone
3. Practice your goal regularly by telling yourself, ‘Let’s just see what happens if I try.’ If you make a mistake or forget to follow through regularly, think of the effort you have put in thus far, instead of how far along you are in your goal achievement. Reminding yourself of the effort – how you’ve tried – will feel rewarding

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4 Bringing Others to the Table

Interpersonal Communication

Up to this point, we have focused on self-worth, resilience, and self-efficacy – all concepts revolving around an individual person within the larger world. These ideas of promoting self-worth are extremely important and yet, in many ways, understanding these concepts is only the beginning of living a good life. Life is made up of other people and most of us interact with other people routinely during our day and throughout our lifetime. Most of us have some form of interpersonal communication with another human on a regular basis, often many times a day. Effective interpersonal communication is necessary to negotiate the challenges of everyday living with other people, whether in your personal or professional life. Because human beings are complex and each individual brings his or her own set of internal variables to every situation, the possibilities of interactional outcomes of any given communication can be exponential. In other words – anything can happen!

Interpersonal communication skills are not often explicitly taught to us as children and thus, many of us learn what little we may know from modeling the communication styles of those around us growing up or we develop methods that work to serve our purposes. That means that many of us have a narrow range of interpersonal communication skills. How well we communicate with others is a measure of our interpersonal skills and is the focus of this chapter and the next.

Genograms: A Family Legacy of Communication Patterns

Dr. Eileen Braun was an accomplished obstetrician who was seeing me professionally because of significant interpersonal difficulties she was having with her colleagues at the hospital. She had run into trouble because her coworkers found it challenging to work with her. Specifically, many of the nurses stated that they felt that Dr. Braun did not listen to them and they were often unclear about what she was asking them to do. This is a very big problem when you are trying to operate as a team to bring new life into the world! Nurses stated that Dr. Braun would not ask them directly to do things, but would instead complain to others later about what was done incorrectly. She would often wait for colleagues to ask her about discharge orders or medications, instead of letting them know upfront, and this frustrated many of her fellow workers. Other physicians found her unreliable in her communication and stated that they never really 'knew where her head was.' All of this was adding up to significant challenges in working with Dr. Braun, but Dr. Braun was just as confused about the situation as anyone else.

In my work with her, we ruled out any major psychological problems such as depression or anxiety, and we ruled out any learning or sensory impairments that might be causing issues. She did not appear to meet criteria for a personality disorder, although some of her behaviors did appear to be similar to behaviors associated with some personality disorders. We decided to explore her early family communication style in something called a genogram. A genogram (also known as a family diagram) is a pictorial display of a person's family relationships and medical history. It is created by the individual on a white board or piece of paper and reviewed with their therapist. A genogram is structurally similar to a family tree, but serves a very different purpose. A genogram includes information about relationships and interactions between family members, while a family tree only depicts lineage. A genogram can be used to identify repetitive patterns of behavior and to recognize hereditary tendencies. Imagine a genogram as a family tree with much more detail about how the family members interact with one another. For example, a family tree might show us that 'Grandpa Joe was married to Grandma Grace,' while a genogram could tell us that 'Joe and Grace were married, but they were unhappily married and had a physically abusive relationship.' A genogram holds information about relationships, communication style, addictions, mental, and physical health, among other things. A genogram becomes most valuable when it includes information about several generations. Patterns that are usually hard to decipher seem to jump out once they've been mapped visually.

In developing and reviewing Dr. Braun's genogram, it became apparent that there were some unique communication patterns in her family that were contributing to her current difficulties. One specific example was particularly obvious. She stated that in her family of origin it was considered rude to ask directly for what you wanted. The family of five would sit down for dinner in the evening, for example, and when at the table, if young Eileen wanted the salt, she would not dare ask directly for the salt, but would instead ask the table if they wanted salt. This was the clue for them to decline the salt and instead ask if Eileen wanted the salt. She would say 'yes, thank you' and obtain the salt. This made perfect sense at her home and worked to this day with her parents, but it did not work so well in the rest of the world. She had learned to communicate in a very indirect manner and this was only one of the many examples from her childhood. Additional issues were revealed about how the children did not directly address their authoritarian father, but instead information was passed through their mother to their father and back again the same way. Eileen learned not to directly communicate with authority figures. You can imagine how these learned patterns had worked in the original context of her home, but were not currently serving her well. With these revelations, Dr. Braun was able to see how her communication style was not very effective at work (and in most other areas of her life) and we spent the remainder of our sessions on helping her learn more adaptive interpersonal communication skills.

You can create and examine your own genogram as an exercise to explore your own learning history regarding interpersonal interactions and communication. Genograms were first developed and popularized in clinical settings by Monica McGoldrick and Randy Gerson through the publication of a book in 1985 (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). Genograms are now used by various groups of people in a variety of fields such as medicine, psychology, social work, genealogy, genetic research, and education. There are many books and websites on the topic of genograms. Genograms use a combination of special rules and symbols to depict a lot of information about families as succinctly as possible. Some of these rules and practices have been standardized, but you can also make up your own. The main idea is to begin to look systematically at your family and the impact of them and their relationships upon you and how you interact in the world. The idea is to explore the 'rules' that you learned growing up because of being around these people. These rules may be explicit or implied. Explicit rules may have been specifically stated to you: 'Do not speak unless you are spoken to.' 'If you can't say something good, don't say anything.' Other implied rules may be things like 'It is not OK to ask for what you want' or 'Speaking truth to authority is not OK.' Once you become clearer about the rules you have learned, you can be more intentional in your interactions. In other words, learning more about the rules of interacting that you have can help you see what may be working now and what may not be so helpful. Only with this knowledge and intention can you make positive changes to your interpersonal communications now. If you know that you have learned to ask for things indirectly, then you can be more aware and intentionally ask for things directly. With practice, you can augment your learning and expand your interpersonal skills and hopefully increase your effectiveness!

Importance of Interpersonal Communication

Communication is an integral part of life; it is not only important in helping us at work and in relationships, but without it, we would not survive. Communication occurs when you transmit information to another person. Successful communication occurs when the recipient of the message actually understands what you are trying to tell him and then provides feedback letting you know that he understands the message. We are constantly communicating with each other, both with words and nonverbally. Indeed, because communication goes beyond the words we say, we often experience problems in our attempts to communicate effectively with others. We can learn maladaptive strategies for communicating, like Dr. Braun did, and we can also run into difficulties when our verbal and nonverbal messages do not match or when we are not aware of the impact of our nonverbal communication.

Interpersonal communication consists of verbal, written, and signed language in addition to nonverbal methods of conveying information, such as body language, facial expressions, gestures, etc. In fact, Dr. Albert Mehrabian, a Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, is known for his famous breakdown of human communication by modality. He asserts that we rarely communicate emotional messages through the spoken word. According to Dr. Mehrabian, 93% of the time we communicate our emotions nonverbally, with at least 55% of that 93% associated with facial gestures. Vocal cues, body position and movement, and space between speaker and receiver can also be clues to feelings and attitudes of others (Mehrabian, A., 1972). While some psychologists may disagree on those numbers, all agree that nonverbal communication dominates verbal.

Verbal and nonverbal communication begins at birth and ends at death. We need communication not only to transmit information and knowledge to one another, but more importantly, to relate to one another as human beings around the world in the context of relationships, families, organizations, communities, and nations. Specifically, interpersonal communication is a key life skill and can be used to do all of the following (and maybe more!):

- Give and get information
- Influence the attitudes and behaviors of others
- Form and maintain relationships
- Make sense of the world and our experiences in it
- Express personal needs and understand the needs of others
- Give and receive emotional support
- Make decisions and solve problems
- Anticipate and predict behavior
- Regulate power

We are, as humans, social creatures and interpersonal communication and relationships are crucial for development and growth. The World Health Organization (WHO) now recognizes social relationships as an important social determinant of health throughout our lives (WHO, 2019). In fact, Dr. Vivek Murthy, former Surgeon General of the United States, recently wrote: 'Loneliness and weak social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day' (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Thus, the importance of effective interpersonal skills for developing and maintaining healthy and supportive relationships cannot be underestimated.

Challenges to Effective Communication

Interpersonal communication can either help us or harm us as we attempt to coexist as individuals, cultures, and governments. What we say, how we say it, and what we mean by it can impact us day to day in small ways or in large scale, life-changing ways. Interpersonal difficulties range from someone who has pervasive and profound difficulties in establishing any interpersonal relationships to someone who has an occasional misunderstanding with a friend. There can be individual differences in communication styles that impact small groups of people and larger cultural differences that impact societies. Communication difficulties can be brief and easily resolvable or they can be enduring. I have worked with patients all along this continuum and one thing is clear to me – interpersonal communication challenges are more common than you may expect.

There are a number reasons that interpersonal communication can fail. These reasons can be based on the individual learning histories of the people interacting, the larger environmental context, or the interpersonal dynamics that we know from research in the area of communication. In order to make effective interpersonal communication happen, it is necessary to understand your own communication 'rules' that have been learned over the years and to also understand the known dynamics of interpersonal communication that have been studied for decades by psychologists and social scientists.

Traditionally, people have exchanged their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings mainly in the form of face-to-face conversation or interaction. However, with the increased availability and popularity of electronic communication, people are communicating more and more by phone, text, video, and other methods such as social media. There has been an undeniable *shift* in focus from interpersonal to digital communication after the rise of the Internet. These avenues of communication add their own complexities. While emails and social media posts are quick and easy ways to relay messages to other people, face-to-face interactions have been shown to help make deeper and more meaningful connections with others (Keller, 2013). Thus, though the digital world has brought an abundance of new communication opportunities, such as the ability to connect with people across the world quickly and effectively, the quality of these relationships has taken a hit.

According to Paul Booth, Ph.D., a Professor of media and cinema studies in the College of Communication at DePaul University in Chicago, social media certainly affects how we engage with one another across all venues and ages. He reports that there has been a shift away from face-to-face interaction and more toward 'mediated communication' or communication via technology interface. He gives examples about how many people now would rather email than meet in person and would prefer to text than talk on the phone (Davisson & Booth, 2016). In fact, millennials are often criticized for lacking effective face-to-face interpersonal skills (Pew Research Center, 2018). According to Professor Booth (2016), studies have shown that people actually are becoming more social and more interactive with others – it's just that the style of that communication has changed and we're not meeting face-to-face as often as we used to. The big change is that those interpersonal interactions on social media tend to be weak ties. We don't feel as personally connected to the people at the other end of our communication as we do when we are face-to-face. Most experts agree that we will need to be aware of the changing methods of communicating and explore the impacts of these various forms of non-face-to-face interaction. We could write an entire book on this topic alone and it will undeniably be an increasingly important area of research. That being said, we will focus in the remainder of this chapter on the dynamics of interpersonal interactions with the understanding that most of the research in this area was conducted with face-to-face interactions.

The Interpersonal Circle

The interpersonal circumplex or circle is a fundamental idea in contemporary interpersonal psychotherapy (Keisler, 1983, 1996; Klerman, Weissman, Markowitz, & Klerman, 2007). It is one of the single most important concepts that I teach my patients, students, colleagues, and other professionals! It never ceases to amaze me that most people – even very well educated, competent individuals – have never been exposed to this information. It sometimes seems like I have given people the 'secret handbook' that allows them to understand their own and others' interpersonal interactions! The knowledge in this model is not 'rocket science' but at the same time, it is not completely intuitive to many – due, I suspect, to their own learning histories.

We all have an interpersonal impact on others and others have an impact on us. Think about the last time you were in a good mood, happy, and positive, and then you interacted with someone – maybe a cashier or a co-worker, who was in a super cranky mood. Most likely, you were negatively impacted by their interpersonal stance. You may have even lost that happy vibe for the rest of the day. We all have an interpersonal impact on others, whether we know it or not. Even withdrawn, depressed people who may feel that they do not have any power, actually impact others in significant ways. If you have ever been around a seriously depressed or helpless person, you know this.

The interpersonal circumplex or circle is a model for conceptualizing and assessing interpersonal motives, dispositions, values, and interactions. It was originally developed in the 1950s by Dr. Timothy Leary (1957) as part of his work heading up the Kaiser Foundation Research Project. This work involved developing Leary's interpersonal model of personality. Leary proposed that personality manifests primarily in the context of relationships, rather than being comprised of character traits or clusters of clinical symptoms. He used the circumplex to help describe these different personalities. The circumplex has been revised over time, but the original core ideas remain, and have been validated by substantial research over the decades (Boudreaux, Ozer, Oltmanns, & Wright, 2018; Horowitz, Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 2000; Kiesler, 1996; Locke, 2006).

The interpersonal circle is a model represented by a circular continuum formed from the intersection of two orthogonal axes: a vertical axis describing a continuum of agency, status, dominance, or control and a horizontal axis describing a continuum of affiliation or closeness. This is a well-studied model for conceptualizing, organizing, and assessing interpersonal motives, dispositions, desires, skills, and interactions. In recent years, it has become conventional to identify the vertical axis as *agency* (do I have more or less power, am I dominant or passive in this moment with this other person?) and the horizontal axis as *affiliation* (do I want to affiliate/approach/get close to this other person or disaffiliate/avoid/move away from the person in the moment?). The opposing sides of the power or agency vertical axis are labeled as dominance and submission. In my work with patients, we often change these labels to assertiveness and passiveness, since those words appear to resonate more deeply. The opposing sides of the affiliation horizontal axis are friendly and hostile or love and hate (Wiggins, 1996). I typically use the terminology of wanting to approach, move toward, or cooperate with someone on one end and wanting to avoid or move away from another person on the other end to describe the continuum of this axis. With this description, you can now imagine a circle with two orthogonal axes shown in Figure 4.1.

Both axes are essential, yet distinct, aspects of an interpersonal interaction. Decades of research support that these two primary axes underlie most interpersonal interactions (Boudreaux, Ozer, Oltmanns, & Wright, 2018; Horowitz, Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 2000; Kiesler, 1996; Locke, 2006). According to the researchers in this area of interpersonal interactions, natural selection has favored coordinating agency and affiliation (Boudreaux, Ozer, Oltmanns, & Wright, 2018; Horowitz, Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 2000; Kiesler, 1996; Locke, 2006). This means

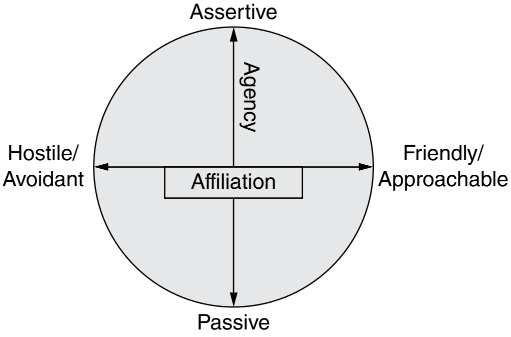
Assertive
Agency
Hostile/
Avoidant
Affiliation
Friendly/
Approachable
Passive

Figure 4.1 The Two Axes of the Interpersonal Circumplex

that there are interactions between people that are what researchers call 'complementary responses' that naturally go together and then there are other interpersonal behaviors are not coordinated on these two axes and these are called 'non-complementary' responses. Think about it – our ancestors who survived in groups were able to communicate effectively, to move around the circle and take interpersonal positions that facilitated cooperation and survival. Thus, understanding the dynamics of the interpersonal circle is an important component in succeeding socially. We will get to this later in this chapter and the next, but first we'll cover a bit more about the circle.

The interpersonal circle can be further divided into broad segments (such as fourths) or narrow segments (such as sixteenths), but currently most interpersonal circle inventories partition the circle into eight octants. As you move around the circle, each octant reflects a progressive blend of the two axial dimensions. Thus, each point in the interpersonal circumplex space can be specified as a weighted combination of agency and affiliation. This is shown in Figure 4.2.

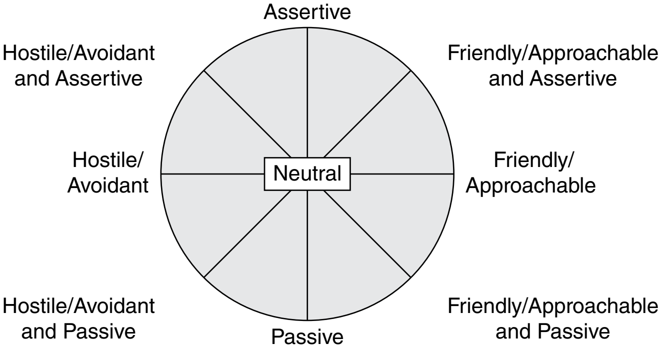
Assertive
Hostile/Avoidant
and Assertive
Friendly/Approachable
and Assertive
Hostile/
Avoidant
Neutral
Friendly/
Approachable
Hostile/Avoidant
and Passive
Passive
Friendly/Approachable
and Passive

Figure 4.2 Domains of the Interpersonal Circumplex

Assessing Interpersonal Communication

The really wonderful things about the interpersonal circle are that you can assess where you or other people are on the circle and predict interpersonal 'pulls,' or predictable responses. The interpersonal 'pull' is the urge to react emotionally or behaviorally in response to another person based upon your perception of that other person's interpersonal behavior. There are validated tests that measure different aspects of where people are on the interpersonal circle and how this impacts others. Multiple psychological tests have been designed and tested to measure the eight interpersonal circumplex octants in a variety of ways. In fact, you can assess not only interactions but also describe personality styles, interpersonal problems, strengths, values, and goals. These tests include those listed below.

- Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IAS; Wiggins, 1995) is a measure of interpersonal traits associated with each octant of the interpersonal circumplex
- Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP; Horowitz, Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 2000) is a measure of problems associated with each octant of the interpersonal circumplex
- Inventory of Interpersonal Strengths (IIS; Hatcher & Rogers, 2009) is a measure of strengths associated with each octant
- Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values (CSIV; Locke, 2000) is a 64-item measure of the value individuals place on interpersonal experiences associated with each octant of the interpersonal circumplex
- Person's Relating to Others Questionnaire (PROQ; Birtchnell & Evans, 2004) is designed to measure a person's negative-relating tendencies. It was developed by the British doctor John Birtchnell
- Impact Message Inventory-Circumplex (IMI; Kiesler, Schmidt, & Wagner, 1997) assesses the interpersonal dispositions of a target person, not by asking the target person directly, but by assessing the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that the target evokes in another person

Assessments such as the Impact Message Inventory of Kiesler (IMI; Kiesler, Schmidt, & Wagner, 1997) can be used to describe in a reliable way the interpersonal pulls between people when they are interacting. You can use the interpersonal circle to help people better understand their impact on others as well as others' impact on them. Using these assessments can be very helpful in therapy and in day-to-day personal use. Knowing this information can help improve your understanding of interpersonal interactions and potentially increase your interpersonal effectiveness. Some versions of these assessments are on the Internet and people can access them for free and determine some of their own interpersonal characteristics – or you could just ask someone who knows you well to tell you! I find that it often works just as well if you can get an honest assessment from a friend or loved one! You can also use your own knowledge of how other people make you feel in order to figure out where they are on the interpersonal circle as well as where you might be.

Interpersonal theory and research shows us that people interact in predictable ways along the two domains described above. As we stated, agency is described on a continuum from assertiveness to submission, and these two opposite ends 'pull' for each other. We call this a 'complementary' response. An example might be when Sue says to her partner, Max, 'I want to eat at that new sushi place tonight – let's make reservations.' Her behavior can be described as assertive and this assertive behavior pulls a complementary submissive response; Max says 'sure, that is fine with me.' Affiliation is described on a continuum from friendly or approachable to hostile or producing a desire to avoid. The affiliation axis acts differently from the agency axis, in that the affiliation domains repel each other. You can see this illustrated in Figure 4.3.

That means that hostile/avoidant interactions 'pull' for hostile/avoidant urges or responses and friendly/approach behaviors 'pull' friendly/approach interpersonal feelings or urges in others. An example might be if Max were to smile at Sue and say to her 'I love having dinner with you.' This is a friendly interpersonal behavior and would in this circumstance most likely be reciprocated with a similar response from Sue such as 'I love it too!' Friendly approach behaviors pull complementary responses of the same. Likewise, hostile/avoidant interpersonal behaviors pull hostile/avoidant feelings, urges, and sometimes even responses. If someone scowls at you or says something aggressive, the urge is to be hostile in response or to avoid dealing with that person. This does not

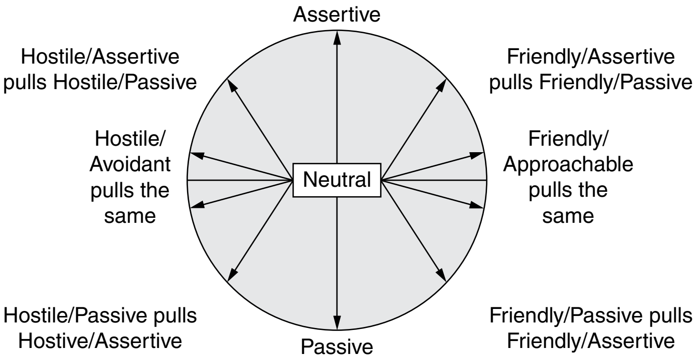
Assertive
Hostile/Assertive pulls Hostile/Passive
Friendly/Assertive pulls Friendly/Passive
Hostile/ Avoidant pulls the same
Neutral
Friendly/ Approachable pulls the same
Hostile/Passive pulls Hostive/Assertive
Passive
Friendly/Passive pulls Friendly/Assertive

Figure 4.3 Complementary Pulls and Neutral Stance in the Interpersonal Circumplex

mean that an actual hostile/avoidant action will always be taken, but just that an urge or feeling is created in or pulled from the other person in response. If a large, scary man yells nasty things to me on the street (a hostile interpersonal behavior), I will most likely feel hostility toward him or want to avoid him or both. I may feel hostile, but not yell back at him due to safety concerns, and I may take the behavioral route of avoiding or staying away from him. Either way, it is clear that if I perceive his behavior as hostile it will have a similar unpleasant interpersonal pull on me.

There are combination areas in the interpersonal circle, including hostile/avoidant + assertive and hostile/avoidant + submissive on the hostile side of the circle and friendly/approach + dominant and friendly/approach + submissive on the friendly side. These components pull for each other in ways similar to the horizontal affiliation axis. This means that a friendly-assertive behavior pulls a friendly-submissive response and vice versa and a hostile-assertive behavior pulls a hostile-submissive response and vice versa. An example of the latter might be if Jayne yells at her son Maceo to shut up and do his homework (a hostile-assertive behavior), the natural interpersonal pull for Maceo is in the hostile-submissive domain. Thus, Maceo may have the urge to behave in a passive-aggressive manner, such as doing his homework but poorly, slowly, or complaining to his father about how mean his mother is. The idea is not that Maceo is a bad person for being passive-aggressive, but the realization that it is a natural pull interpersonally to behave or feel passive- aggressive when confronted with a perceived hostile-assertive or aggressive interpersonal behavior.

The interpersonal circle domains can be quantified based on intensity, which means that you can determine not only *if* someone has a characteristic interpersonal style, but you can also measure *how much* of that characteristic they have in a specific interaction. Thus, you can assess if someone is behaving super friendly, moderately friendly, just a little bit friendly, or if you can't really identify if they are friendly or not. The perimeter of the circle is the most extreme level and the intensity decreases as you move toward the middle of the circle. The very middle is what we call 'neutral.' Think about it – as you have fewer extreme behaviors interpersonally, you are harder to 'read' and are increasingly perceived by others as neither super friendly, avoidant, assertive, or passive – you are neutral. This is an intentionally neutral place where one is mindfully aware of the interactions, noticing with perspective, yet still involved.

Neutral on the interpersonal circle is a very valuable place to be able to go to interpersonally, as it allows you to be mindful of yourself and others, and promotes the gathering of additional information prior to responding to others interpersonally. We will talk a lot more about this in Chapter 5.

Follow-Up with Dr. Eileen Braun

When I was working with Dr. Eileen Braun on her interpersonal skills, I completed an assessment on her about how she made *me* feel when we interacted. We also got data from her co-workers, peers, and those who worked under her, such as her resident physicians and nurses. We discovered that her interpersonal communication style was perceived to be in the hostile-submissive domain of the interpersonal circle by most people and was also sometimes perceived in the submissive domain as well as the purely hostile domain. This meant that many people in Dr. Braun's work life were perceiving her interpersonal interactions in a way that naturally pulled hostility from them toward Dr. Braun. They were not bad people – they were responding to a perceived interpersonal pull and even if they did not act on those pulls, they felt them. As we have discussed, most of our communication is via the nonverbal modalities, so that means that even if Eileen's precise words to others were not angry or hateful, her colleagues may have reacted to her nonverbal communication and felt a hostile pull. It also means that even though Dr. Braun's colleagues may not have responded to her with hostile words, their body language and nonverbal responses gave them away as feeling hostile and aggressive toward her perceived hostile-submissive interpersonal behaviors.

Dr. Braun and her impact on others can be mapped onto the interpersonal circle for a helpful visual (see Figure 4.4). Dr. Braun's colleagues rated her as being in the hostile/avoidant quadrant of the circle and their complementary response was predictably in the hostile/assertive quadrant. After several months of working to help Dr. Braun understand her interpersonal impact and learn new adaptive interpersonal skills, we reassessed her impact and discovered that she was perceived as more assertive and friendlier! Our work was a success!

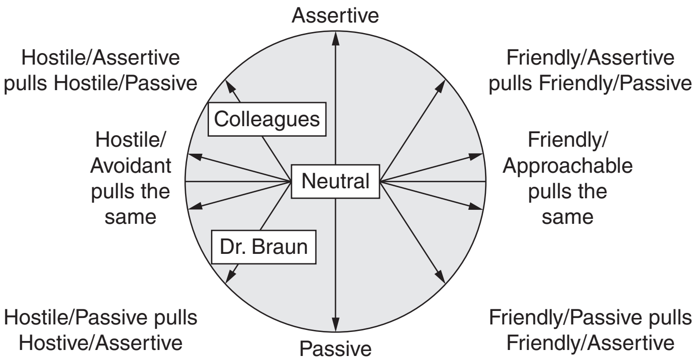
Assertive
Hostile/Assertive pulls Hostile/Passive
Friendly/Assertive pulls Friendly/Passive
Colleagues
Hostile/ Avoidant pulls the same
Neutral
Friendly/ Approachable pulls the same
Dr. Braun
Hostile/Passive pulls Hostive/Assertive
Passive
Friendly/Passive pulls Friendly/Assertive

Figure 4.4 Dr. Braun's Initial Interpersonal Style and Complementary Response from Others

What You Can Do for Yourself

Knowing more about the information described in this chapter can help you explore your own learned interpersonal communication habits and styles and the impacts on others. It can also help you realize that each individual person is carrying around their own set of learned assumptions, beliefs, and styles of interaction. The information reviewed also helps you understand that there are additional dynamics of how interpersonal communication works that are also going on simultaneously when we interact with others.

With respect to knowing your own learning history, we encourage you to take the time to construct your own genogram or even encourage your partner, spouse, friend, or trusted other to do one with you. As the American author Michael Crichton is credited with saying in his book *Timeline, 'If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree.'*

Once you have decided to make your genogram, it is helpful and important to determine the reason you are doing it. Set an intention. Often we encourage people to set a goal of exploring patterns in the family. Having an open and curious mind is helpful. Once your intention is set, there are three basic steps to making your genogram. You will want a general outline of your family structure or whatever group of people were around to raise you; then fill in information about these people; and finally fill in information about how they all got along or related to each other.

The outline of the family structure is the first phase. There are templates for making genograms now online or you can do the old fashion method of writing it out with pen and paper (see Figure 4.5). You can

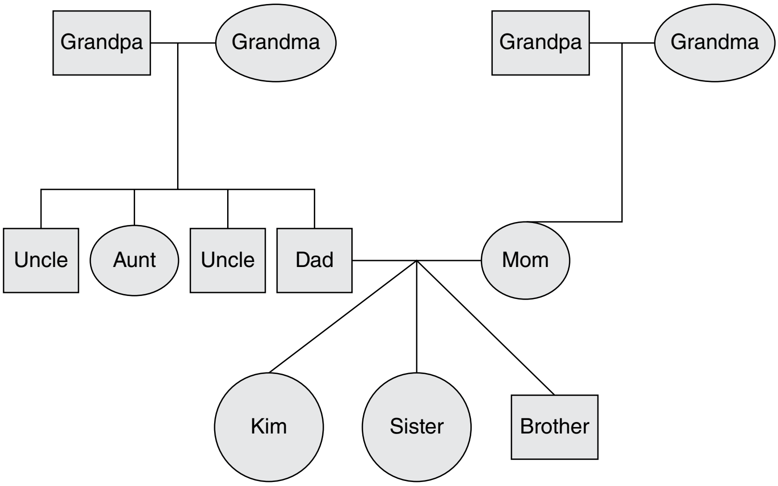

Figure 4.5 Sample of Family Genogram Template

use standardized symbols to represent the data or make up your own. The most commonly used symbols are:

- Men are represented by a square, and women by a circle
- Marriages are represented with the man's symbol to the left and the woman's symbol to the right, joined together by a horizontal line
- Two diagonal, parallel lines represent a divorce or separation
- The children are organized from oldest to youngest, going from left to right

Never lose sight of your genogram's purpose. If you have to, create specific symbols to represent relevant things. They may be abuse, alcoholism, miscarriages, suicides, fatal accidents, or any other factor that is important to you.

The second stage in making your genogram is adding more information. What you add will be based in part on your intention, but you may wish to include at least:

- Demographic information (dates of birth and death, education level, wedding and divorce dates, etc.)
- Information on the level of functionality (did people work, were they sick, homeless, suffer from mental illness, addiction, etc.)
- Crucial family events such as deaths, immigrations, criminal acts, etc.

In the third part of making your genogram, you add description about the details of the relationships between the family members with a focus on the psychological links between people. Examples include if people had a close loving relationship, argued frequently, or were estranged. You can use some standardized symbols to represent relationships that are close, distant, tense, and conflicted. And it's also good to have some symbols to represent cases of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. As best you can, it is important to base information on what you know to be true, and not just rumor. This might mean that you need to contact people who know more about each family member in order to fill out your genogram as accurately as you can.

When you are finished with the genogram, you can look for patterns based on your intention. All the information you've gathered, organized, and represented visually should help you find patterns. The patterns are the key to understanding if there is a pattern of dysfunctional behavior passed from generation to generation or communication patterns and styles that work in the family, but not so much outside of the family. You can find out recurring themes of hostile interpersonal communication and positive supportive ones. If you have a trusted other person doing this exercise with you, you can both talk about your genograms and work together to find patterns.

In my continuing education work with physicians and healthcare workers who are burned out, we have the participants draw their genograms on their own and then bring them into the class to review in front of the entire group of 6–8 people. This is a very powerful exercise and often the clinicians open up and discuss things they learned from their families of origin that they have never shared with anyone. This exercise often leads to deeper insight into why people are communicating the way they do and also helps identify problematic patterns of interpersonal communication or relationships. Completing and reviewing your genogram definitely won't give you all the information possible, but it will give valuable clues. Importantly, it may help you understand the causes of some of the problematic issues happening now in your life. A genogram is essentially a picture of the road leading to your own story. It's the history written before you were born. After all, every one of us is just a chapter in a story that started a long time ago.

What You Can Do for Another

Most people are never educated about the genogram or the interpersonal circle. One of the things you can do for someone you love, especially a younger person in your life, is to introduce them to the idea of the interpersonal circle and how it works. It can be rewarding to bring this up when a younger person in your life might be struggling with a difficult interpersonal interaction or even a challenging personality in their life. You can have something meaningful to share with them in the form of the interpersonal circle.

I have done this with my daughter, Morgan, and with other people, including younger friends and colleagues. It can be helpful to listen to the other person's description of the negative or stressful or confusing interpersonal interaction and then describe the circle to them to help them make better sense of things. You can even draw the circle when explaining it, and then have a conversation about where they think they and the other person are on the circle. This is so helpful because it helps the person begin to make sense not only of what is happening interpersonally but also helps them perhaps take things less personally because they may realize that some of the interpersonal reactions are automatic according to the theory underlying the interpersonal circle. For example, you can explain that we respond hostile to what we perceive as hostile and friendly to friendly, etc. This is how we are theorized to be hardwired. You can have a discussion about where the other person thinks they are on the interpersonal circle most of the time they are just being themselves, and where they think they are with other certain people or in certain situations, such as school, playing sports, or hanging out with their friends, etc. You can also talk about where they aspire to be, or where they see other people being on the circle. Explaining the circle and how it works is also helpful in that it provides a way of thinking about other possible ways of interacting that might be effective.

Exercise to Increase Awareness

Replacing 'I'm Sorry' with 'Thank You'

We've explored a number of ways to facilitate positive interpersonal communication in this chapter, and beginning to modify the way you communicate with other people can seem like a daunting task – especially when that task involves un-learning many of the communication methods you may have learned growing up. While learning new communication modes takes consistent effort over time, even changing the smallest ways that you communicate can make a huge difference in your professional, personal, and everyday relationships. For example, one of the most powerful tools I learned in my early twenties involved replacing 'I'm sorry' with 'thank you.' I used to find myself saying 'sorry' for a lot of things – arriving to class late, pausing while answering a question, or requesting assistance on a difficult task. I found that I often practiced negative self-talk when I constantly apologized for these things, many of which weren't even mistakes! Since I was 'sorry,' I was conveying to myself and to those with whom I communicated that I was at fault, and the focus was on me. When I mentioned this to my college career counselor, she provided me with a now invaluable tool – to replace those 'I'm sorry' with 'thank you.' Instead of saying, 'I'm sorry that I'm late to class,' I'd say, 'Thank you for your patience and understanding.' Instead of apologizing for pausing while answering a question, I'd say, 'Thank you for the thoughtful question.' Instead of apologizing for requesting assistance (that my tutor happily provided!) I'd thank them for helping me. I found that when I began to thank others for their grace, they responded more positively, and I was better able to let go of negative self-talk and move on. No longer were these conversations focusing on how things were my fault or how I felt bad – they were now focused on gratitude for the help, or patience, or support of the other person! I even felt myself practicing gratitude more freely and expressing it to others more openly, which certainly helped to facilitate smoother, more positive communication!

The next time you find yourself about to say 'sorry' for something, pause for three seconds and think about how you can reframe it to say 'thank you.' Take these examples for reference:

> *I'm sorry, but I can't attend the event.' → 'Thank you for the invitation; however, I will not be able to attend.'*

'I'm sorry that I made this mistake.' → *'Thank you for helping me rectify this mistake.'*

'I'm sorry that I'm late.' → *'Thank you for your patience.'*

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5 Put It in Neutral: Interpersonal Mindfulness

Introduction to Interpersonal Mindfulness

Interpersonal relationships with friends, co-workers, loved ones, and people in general are impacted by many factors. As we have discussed, in any interpersonal exchange, each person brings their own unique set of qualities, expectations, and history to the interaction. A vital component to creating meaningful, respectful, and authentic relationships with others involves taking responsibility for your own behaviors, expectations, and goals when you are interacting with others. To do this, you must be able to get into a mindset that can be more objective and aware without automatically emotionally or behaviorally reacting. When you begin to realize that the only person's behavior you can truly control is your own, effective interpersonal communications become simplified and more straightforward.

It is possible to become mindfully aware of your personal style of interacting through being open to feedback without defensiveness, being reasonably flexible in making compromises, and willing to alter or let go of maladaptive behaviors. Understanding your own genogram and learned patterns of behavior and styles of communication and their impact on others is a helpful step, as is becoming familiar with the theory and predictable implications of the interpersonal circle.

One of the most powerful constructs in the interpersonal circle is the idea of the 'interpersonally neutral area.' The 'neutral space' is in the middle of the circle and indicates an interpersonal stance that is neither friendly nor hostile, dominant nor submissive. It is an intentionally neutral place where one is mindfully aware and observing, yet still involved.

We can increase interpersonal communication effectiveness by increasing awareness of our own interpersonal communication learning history, current thoughts and emotions, and our own interpersonal impact upon others. Thus, we need to be able to know our own emotions, thoughts, reactions, intentions, and feelings, but this is only part of the equation – we also need to be able to perceive the actions and responses of others. Importantly, we can gauge how others are perceiving our interpersonal communication by their emotional and behavioral interpersonal response to us. Awareness of ourselves can then be extended to others – we can become more aware and mindful that others come to us with a learning history and their own interpersonal characteristics as well as reactions to our interpersonal stance. This awareness is the key first step to effectively interacting with others.

In any relationship, be it a friendship or marriage, no one is going to be able to anticipate and satisfy another persons' needs and desires, no one is going to get all of their needs met all of the time. There are, however, many skills and strategies that can be learned and employed within relationships to increase harmony, decrease conflict, reach compromises, and generally be more effective. The trick is to make the choice to put them into practice in the moment; this is called 'going to neutral.' Going to neutral is intentionally moving into that interpersonal mindful state of mind when with another person. By becoming more mindfully connected with the present moment, with the specific other person, it is possible to increase awareness of maladaptive interpersonal patterns that may be occurring. Mindful awareness provides the space for you to choose your behaviors with greater intention and do your part to achieve a positive outcome. Interactions with others won't always automatically go smoothly, but there is peace in knowing that you have the freedom to choose how you will engage with others.

The Power of Neutral: The Cheese Grater Story

Dana suffered from persistent depressive disorder and joined my therapy group decades after her first diagnosis. She had suffered from depression and anxiety for so long that she lost her job and then eventually her home. She was living in a group home with three other women at the time she joined our therapy group. She was very stressed about this living arrangement, and reported to the group that she often felt anxious around her other roommates in the shared spaces of the kitchen and living room. Dana showed up to the group faithfully, but was typically quiet in the group with minimal participation. I often did not know what she was thinking or how she was feeling because she declined to provide much detail about herself, although she was consistently attentive to the didactics and to what others shared. One day in group therapy she looked particularly animated and finally spoke up. She reported that she had purchased a new cheese grater for herself and had used it for a pasta dinner she made herself, and washed it and stored it in her section of the shared kitchen. Dana reported that she returned the next day to the kitchen, only to find her cheese grater missing from her area. She looked around and found it in her newest roommate, Milly's, cupboard! Dana was a bit irritated, but simply took the cheese grater and placed it back in her own area of the kitchen without saying anything to Milly. She forgot about it, but a few days later the same thing happened, and happened again another few days later. Dana was now becoming very angry. She was perceiving her roommate's behaviors as hostile and was feeling a predictable hostile reaction.

I drew a big interpersonal circle on the white board of the group therapy room and asked the group members to think about where on the circle they thought that Milly's behaviors were. They predictably said that Milly was being hostile in taking Dana's grater without asking. Some other members thought Milly was hostile-assertive for taking it and some thought Milly was hostile-passive because she didn't say anything to Dana about it. All agreed that Milly was on the hostile side of the circle. I then asked where the group members perceived Dana's actions to be on the interpersonal circle, and how it was related to Milly's interpersonal stance. They all endorsed that Dana's response was also hostile and most stated that they thought she was hostile-passive because she didn't speak up and ask Milly about her behavior.

We then turned to Dana in the group and asked her what she thought about the group's responses and what she felt during that part of her story with Milly. Dana admitted that she felt like Milly was intentionally disrespecting her and endorsed that she thought Milly's behaviors were very hostile-assertive. We explored how Dana's response was predictable in that it was on the hostile side and fairly passive. She took the grater back and felt very angry and resentful, but did not say anything to Milly.

Dana then surprised the group and continued with her story. She stated that she remembered the skills we had discussed and practiced in the group sessions regarding going to neutral on the interpersonal circle. Specifically, Dana reported that after the most recent time that she found her cheese grater missing, she decided to do something different. She decided to go to neutral. She took a deep breath and thought about what was going on. She intentionally went to a neutral state of mind, focused on thinking about what she might be missing and tried to drop the judgment she felt that was generated by her anger and irritation. She realized that she did not really mind if Milly used her cheese grater, but that she just wanted Milly to ask to use it and also to return it to Dana's area of the kitchen. Dana also realized that she had been expecting Milly to know this information on her own. Dana was expecting Milly to read her mind, but this was not happening. With this pause and newly gained perspective from a more neutral mind set, Dana was able to then set a goal of letting Milly know this. Dana calmly asked to speak with Milly about this and then told Milly her request. The group was congratulatory toward Dana and many members let her know how proud they were of her. All agreed that she was successful in 'getting to neutral' and that this seemed to be helpful in allowing her to set a realistic and assertive interpersonal goal with Milly.

Dana continued with her story, reporting that she did actually then speak to Milly. She tried to stay in a neutral yet assertive place interpersonally, focusing on her goal. Dana reported that she asked Milly if it was a good time to speak and then explained to Milly that she was fine with Milly using the cheese grater, and she then plainly requested that after Milly used her cheese grater to please return it to Dana's section of the kitchen. Dana reported that Milly then did something completely unexpected! Milly told Dana that she, Milly, had also purchased the same cheese grater in the past and had thought she lost it in her move, but when she saw it in Dana's things, she assumed it was her own and replaced it in her own cupboard. She had assumed that it had somehow been in her things and reappeared during the move to her new apartment with Dana. Milly thought the cheese grater was her own! In fact, Milly was able to share with Dana that when she would see it in Dana's kitchen area, she had the same experience of irritation and took it back! There had been a total lack of communication that went on for weeks until Dana was able to get to a neutral place, examine the situation in a mindful way, and then set a realistic course of action for herself and do it! Dana and Milly were able to have a laugh about it all and ended up feeling closer interpersonally. They also agreed to ask each other directly when they had questions or concerns. In other words, both Milly and Dana moved into the more assertive area of the circle and were on the friendly instead of hostile side.

In hearing this twist to the story, the group members also laughed and many appeared to have an 'aha' moment! Things are not always as they seem. The group members were able to see the positive impact of going to neutral, lessening judgement, gaining perspective, setting a realistic goal, and then having the courage to move into a more assertive yet friendly interpersonal stance in order to move forward in a more productive manner. I still share this story in group therapy and it has come to be known as the 'cheese grater' lesson!

Interpersonal Circle and Effectiveness

A solid understanding of the interpersonal circle is so helpful in making sense of people and how they respond to each other (Waldherr & Muck, 2011)! Knowing generally what interpersonal stance 'pulls' for other interpersonal responses is key to navigating the interpersonal circle and being effective. The idea is to be aware and intentional when interacting. This is a way to increase not only your interpersonal effectiveness but also boost what is called emotional intelligence (EI). For example, if you are interacting with another and you are surprised or confused by their response, this may be a clue to you that you need to think about the interpersonal circle and where you think you are versus where others seem to be perceiving you to be. If you think that you are being friendly-assertive, but others are responding to you in a hostile manner, this is a big clue. It could mean that you are coming across differently than you wanted, or it could mean that the others are in a more hostile place due to other reasons. What is the key to moving forward successfully?

I would propose that going to neutral, just like Dana did, would be the most helpful thing to do first. Remember that neutral behavior goes toward the center of the circle and more extreme or intense behavior toward the outside of the circle (Wiggins, 1996). Take a deep breath, focus on being present without judgement, and try to be curious but gentle about the situation. This can help take you to a neutral place. As your behavior becomes less extreme, you move into a place where you can see things more objectively and create less reactions from others. It is like you are moving into a place of observation and gathering more information. Neutral on the interpersonal circle is not the same thing as passive or submissive. Being passive is itself an interpersonal style of interacting that elicits an assertive response from the other person. Neutral is a place where it is hard for people to label you as extremely interpersonally hostile, friendly, assertive, or passive. Being neutral interpersonally helps you gain perspective regarding what you are experiencing and how it is related to what those around you are also experiencing with you. Once you are in a neutral place, you typically have more clarity about the situation and you certainly have more options. Remember, neutral is a place of increased options and thus it is an interpersonal place that may be more helpful in achieving your goals. Learning to get to neutral interpersonally is certainly a worthwhile skill to learn.

After people learn about the interpersonal circle, they often ask, 'What is the best way to be, interpersonally? Where should I be on the circle?' Sometimes people assume that they should always be on the friendly side of the circle or sitting in neutral like some sort of interpersonal saint. The answer I give is that there is not necessarily any one 'right' place to be on the interpersonal circle at any given time. The goal of learning about the interpersonal circle is to allow people to be more aware in an informed way and to be intentional and effective in moving around the circle. To be effective, a person needs to understand the circle and how it relates to interpersonal interactions. An effective person will have skills in moving around the interpersonal circle intentionally, meaning that they can move around the circle and also can recognize where others are on the circle. Importantly, as we saw with Dana, being able to go to neutral is another important skill.

The circle helps make sense of many interactions, but remember, all people also come to an interaction with their own learning history. When interacting with others, we are influenced by our own history and interpersonal characteristics as well as the other person's history and interpersonal characteristics. There are basically two components to predicting how we will be with others interpersonally: our learning history (our personal 'rules' or 'maps' learned from those who raised us) and the rules of the interpersonal circle which predict interpersonal dispositions and interactions based on the two axes described in Chapter 4. This means that although the dynamics of the interpersonal circle will explain a good deal, there are always going to be aspects that are unique to the individual.

Some people get 'stuck' in one area of the interpersonal circle due to their own learning history. For example, I have met people who grew up in families where the caregivers communicated almost exclusively on the hostile side of the circle. Someone growing up in such a situation would learn to communicate in that area of the circle. Hostile interpersonal interactions, although not particularly comfortable or productive, may be very familiar to such a person. For example, we all know that person who is perpetually in the hostile-assertive interpersonal style no matter how nice you try to be to him. Having this information can be helpful in that perhaps you can still be nice to him, and know that his hostility is not necessarily warranted based on the current interaction, but instead part of his own learning history. Appraising the situation this way can naturally enable you to go to neutral and think about your goals with this crabby, hostile person. You can think about what is realistic as well as what you need to achieve. If the hostile person is your boss and you need to provide him with an update on your progress on a project, you can remind yourself of this and move from neutral to assertive and provide the information in an appropriately assertive manner. Your boss is still on the hostile side, but you can remember to not 'take the bait' of reacting in a hostile manner, since achieving your goal would not be facilitated by being hostile. Behaving in this neutral and then assertive manner, may allow you to achieve your goal, and leave the meeting feeling less angry or hostile.

Going to Neutral

The power of 'going to neutral' on the interpersonal circle is amazing. Some of my patients initially think that being neutral is a place of 'giving up' or being very passive, but it is nothing of the sort. The neutral position on the interpersonal circle is actually a very powerful position in that it allows you to be able to see what is going on both in yourself and in others while still maintaining your perspective. Going to neutral allows you to step back and recognize what is being 'pulled' in you and how it might be related to the other person. Going to neutral promotes a type of metacognition or interpersonal mindfulness. This then allows you to be more intentional and effective when choosing your goal or the next course of action.

One thing that being able to go to neutral allows you to do is to gain perspective on the situation. Humans can be very egocentric, making everything about them, when often this is not the reality. Often a snippy comment from a co-worker, or a less than enthusiastic greeting from a family member has more to do with what they are experiencing than with you! Additionally, a careless wait staff or slow bus driver most likely are not exhibiting their behaviors just to make your life unpleasant. A quick way to remind yourself of this fact, and get yourself closer to neutral, is to use the short phrase 'QTIP' to remind yourself to 'Quit Taking It Personally!'

Some clinical researchers, like Dr. Tim Leary (Freedman et al., 1951), argue that the interpersonal circle can be used to represent a kind of bull's eye of healthy psychological adjustment. Theoretically speaking, Dr. Leary proposed that the most well-adjusted person on the planet could have their personality mapped at the exact center of the circumplex, right at the intersection of the two axes, while individuals consistently exhibiting extremes in personality would be located on the circumference of the circle. While we agree that being able to interpersonally move to the middle or neutral place on the interpersonal circle is healthy, we often promote the idea that the priority for most people is to become aware of this model and learn how to intentionally move around it based on their realistic interpersonal goals in each interpersonal interaction.

Emotional Intelligence

The ability to go to neutral on the interpersonal circle can be related to the concept of EI. EI refers to the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, and to be motivated to do so. EI is not the same thing as intellectual intelligence and they should not be confused. There are plenty of people with high intelligence who may not have similarly high EI – think surgeons, chemistry professors, accountants. Not that people in those professions cannot have both – they can, but they may have a more natural proclivity for intellectual abilities versus emotional ones. EI is generally said to include at least four skills: emotional awareness, or the ability to identify and name one's own emotions; the ability to harness those emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving; and the ability to manage emotions, which includes both regulating one's own emotions when necessary and helping others to do the same. A fifth component of motivation is often added as well, since presumably you must also have the desire to learn, grow, or use EI.

The development of the idea of EI, as a psychological theory, is attributed to Professors Peter Salovey and John D. (Jack) Mayer in 1990. Dr. Salovey is a social psychologist, the Provost of Yale University, and the Chris Argyris Professor of Psychology. Dr. Jack Mayer is a psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of New Hampshire. They were joined later by the psychologist Dr. David Caruso and continued the development of the model. The three developed an EI assessment cleverly called the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test or MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003).

The work of Salovey and Mayer, and the concept of EI, was made popular by the science journalist, Daniel Goleman. Goleman successfully brought 'Emotional Intelligence' into the public arena when he published a book called, 'Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ' in 1996. It was a big hit and topped the best seller list for months. As it turns out, Goleman actually expanded and changed the original concept of EI put forward by Mayer and Salovey, and this has caused some confusion. Thus, we will stick with the original thoughts and research from Salovey and Mayer in our discussion of EI.

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2016) proposed a 16-step developmental model of EI from childhood to adulthood, with the understanding that EI develops over time. This model has four branches:

1 The ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others accurately
2 The ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking
3 The ability to understand emotions, emotional language, and the signals conveyed by emotions
4 The ability to manage emotions so as to attain specific goals

The idea of a developmental model of EI helps us think about the fact that EI both develops as we grow and mature and also can be learned. Some of us may learn EI and effective interpersonal skills from the people we grow up around and interact with, while some of us may have to work to learn these skills intentionally ourselves.

Thinking about these developmental stages when we interact with others can help facilitate effective appraisal of the situation as well as help us set realistic goals. I often remind myself of this when interacting with people who are much younger or less mature than myself. A great example is when you have to interact with an adolescent or someone who has the maturity level of an adolescent. We know that the transition to adolescence marks an especially formative stage of human development where interpersonal awareness and changes in social interactions are happening at the same time as immensely complex hormonal, cognitive, and behavioral transformations (Mufson, Gallagher, Dorta, & Young, 2004). Said plainly, many in this stage of development will be more labile and erratic in their abilities to identify and regulate their own emotions, let alone others' emotions. They may also have zero motivation to do so. Being aware of this helps you set realistic goals for yourself when interacting.

Awareness that EI develops over time can help you target your therapeutic or learning strategies with others more appropriately. For example, we know that when someone lacks EI, he or she becomes more easily flustered by unexpected or perceived negative communications and more likely to do things that they may regret (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). People who have not yet developed sufficient EI tend to react to situations without filtering their responses verbally and tonally and they may exhibit inappropriate body language. When thinking about the interpersonal circle, this means that they may react to a surprise or challenge as hostile and react in a complementary hostile way without thinking, and thus jeopardize relationships.

We can conceptualize that learning to go to neutral on the interpersonal circle is a form of augmenting EI. The model of the interpersonal circle provides a nice visual for helping people to understand where they may be pulled interpersonally and why, and to learn more effective strategies for moving forward interpersonally in a productive manner. Since many emotional reactions happen subconsciously and instantly, many people think that they cannot be controlled, but this is not entirely true. You may feel the hostile pull on the interpersonal circle when someone is rude to you – we all do because we are all human – but this does not mean that you are destined to react with a hostile behavior. As we mature, practice, and gain motivation to collaborate successfully, we can begin to recognize the pulls, go to an interpersonal mindful place, and determine an effective communication style that will help achieve our goals and ultimately, improve our EI.

What You Can Do for Yourself

Getting to neutral on the interpersonal circle can be challenging for many people, and thus it is important to learn multiple strategies to try and intentionally become more skilled at it. Some effective strategies are presented below. We encourage you to try out a few and find out what works for you!

Observe Your Feelings

In today's hectic and pressured world, we can often find ourselves losing touch with our emotions because we are rushing around feeling like we are putting out fires all the time. When we do this, we're far more likely to act unconsciously in response to the pulls of others around us and we miss out on the valuable information that our own emotions can provide to us. You can, however, intentionally work to observe your emotions and feelings. When we pay attention to how we're feeling, we learn to trust our emotions, and we become far more adept at managing them. If you're feeling out of practice, you can literally plan times to observe your own emotions. You can use a ready-made phone app to monitor your emotions, or you can do it the old-fashioned way by setting a timer, or scheduling times during the day to intentionally notice how you are feeling emotionally. You can pay attention to where that emotion is showing up as a physical feeling in your body and what the sensation feels like as well as what your mood is. The more you can practice this, the more it will become second nature.

Practice Responding Instead of Reacting

There's a subtle but important difference between responding and reacting. Reacting may happen without so much thought when we experience an emotional trigger, or are pulled by the interpersonal stance of another. It often causes us to behave in an unconscious way that expresses or relieves that emotion (such as feeling irritated by and snapping at a person who interrupts you). Responding is a more intentional process that involves noticing how you feel, then *deciding* how you want to behave (for example, noticing that you are feeling irritated, connecting it to the interpersonal pull from the person you are interacting [going to neutral], and then deciding how you wish to proceed). Responding is a more thoughtful and intentional response that comes from a more neutral interpersonal perspective and is often more effective.

Gain Perspective

One of the more effective strategies can be to imagine the entire situation as if you were watching it on a sitcom on TV. You can step back and imagine the scene as if you were observing it. For example, let's say you show up late for your hair appointment that you desperately need because you are going to a wedding over the weekend. You left the house on time, but because of a ridiculous amount of traffic on the roads, you are late. The front desk worker tells you that you cannot be seen because they won't have time and then she tells you that you still owe a minimum fee because you did not cancel in time. Many stressful things that happen to us in real life are actually funny to us when we watch it on television. You might laugh at this if it was a show, but when you are in a rush, stressed, frustrated, and thwarted, you may not find it amusing. However, you can take a deep breath, put things in perspective, and go to neutral. This will help you manage your emotions and also buy you some time to think about your options.

What You Can Do for a Young or Teenage Person

Developmentally, younger people may have more challenges identifying and handling emotions in themselves and others, and thus may need additional help in developing these tools. Part of being emotionally intelligent is the ability to be conscious or present with your emotions, and this requires a certain degree of awareness and ability to go to neutral intentionally. Typically, teens are still developing parts of the brain that might inhibit their ability to be aware (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009). The prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain which governs reason and logic) is still developing. For the most part, because teens lack a fully developed prefrontal cortex, they can be emotional and impulsive, and lack some degree of EI. They may also have less motivation to try to get to neutral interpersonally. Despite the fact that their brains may not be fully developed, teens can become more emotionally intelligent. Below are some initial strategies to help encourage a young person to become more emotionally intelligent or be able to go to neutral.

Improve Motivation

Discussing the benefits of becoming more emotionally intelligent or able to get to neutral can help improve motivation to change. Helping a young person understand that there are effective strategies to improve relationships and get along with others can be very motivating. You can also discuss the interpersonal circle, how it works, and help the young person explore their own ideas about different interpersonal pulls. You can help them explore how learning to navigate the interpersonal circle and become more emotionally intelligent can help increase their feelings of confidence, resilience, and improve decision making. These skills can make a significant difference in the lives of teens. This is especially true if a teen is having a challenging time with their peers or with family relationships. Supporting them in becoming more emotionally intelligent can bring about many benefits they can carry into adulthood.

Explain the Names and Role of Emotions

You can help explore the idea of emotions and why we have them, as well as the role of emotions and feelings. This can help a young person better understand the range of emotions, and that there are important reasons why we have them. Emotions vary in kind and intensity and helping to expand the vocabulary and precision of language when describing emotions can be very helpful. For example, you can discuss the differences between 'hate' and 'dislike' and why identifying the accurate emotion is important. If we respond to dislike as if it is hate, our interpersonal reaction may be too strong and become confusing to other people. Thus, knowing how to describe emotions is very important. You can find lists of different emotions on the Internet and have a discussion about them with the young person. You can challenge them to use new and descriptive words to express and describe their emotions. You can also help them understand the role of emotions and the idea that emotions cannot be eliminated, but can be moderated. You can help a young person understand that what emotions tell us is important. Some basic ones to cover include the ones below, and you can always add more!

- Happiness = lets us know we enjoy or like something and may want to approach it
- Anger = signals that something is wrong; gives us energy to address issues
- Sadness = tells us to take a break and reset, recharge, and heal, and lets others know that we might need some help
- Fear = gives us the energy and physical resources to fight or flee something threatening
- Anxiety = creates energy to address something

Attending to the emotion will often give clues about what is needed to find balance or move forward.

Practice Empathy

Empathy is about understanding why someone feels or behaves in a certain way and being able to communicate that understanding to them. It applies to ourselves and other people, and you can help encourage a young person to practice this skill. When a young person notices their mood and gives it a name, then ask them to examine why they think they might be feeling that way. They can use their new understanding of what emotions are telling us, or think about what the current circumstances are that might be related to their mood or emotion. This may be challenging at first, but becomes easier with practice!

Exercise for Mindful Communication

Using 'Hot Seat' as a Mindful Communication Practice Tool

Mindful communication is a skill – something that can be practiced and honed over time, just like another ability! While learning how to mindfully communicate may seem like a daunting task at first, don't be alarmed; it's actually quite simple. One way to practice mindful communication is to play the game 'hot seat' with a group of trusted people, like close friends or family members. Starting with people who you feel comfortable around is a good place to start because it will facilitate an environment of openness and accountability – plus, if you make a mistake, you may not feel as embarrassed around people you trust and love!

'Hot seat' is played with a group of three or more. While it can be played with just two players, you'll understand later in the game description why it is most beneficial as a mindful communication practice tool with three or more people.

Start by choosing a member of the group to be on the 'hot seat.' This person will act as the focus of the game, and will start the game by sharing three items that start with 'If you really knew me, you would know…' (for example, 'If you really knew me, you would know that I am afraid of spiders.'). All other members of the group will ask the person on the 'hot seat' questions of any kind, and can start with questions related to the three items the person on the 'hot seat' shares with the group. The member on the 'hot seat' determines the 'temperature' of their seat, which informs how personal the questions they are asked should be. For a milder hot seat, focus on more surface-level questions, like 'How do you like to relax?,' and for a more intense hot seat, focus on deeper questions, like 'What is your proudest moment?'

The purpose of the game is not only to learn about the person in the 'hot seat' but also to practice mindful communication – specifically, mindful listening. Each person should focus all of their attention on the individual in the 'hot seat,' not only by deeply listening to their answers but also by looking at them and allowing space for them to answer questions. Other members of the group may not interrupt the individual in the 'hot seat' with follow-up questions or their own contributions. After the person in the hot seat answers each question, group members must thank them for answering the question aloud and pause before continuing the conversation.

Listening deeply to the answers of the person in the 'hot seat,' pausing and allowing space before asking questions, and reflecting on an answer before sharing it are key components to mindful communication, which is exemplified through this game. Feel free to practice this in daily life and in the 'hot seat' game, and always remember to listen deeply, think intentionally, and reflect on your response before continuing a conversation – it's all a part of mindfully communicating!

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6 Getting to the Goal

Why Goals Are Important

A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or a group of people envision, plan, and commit to achieve. It can be called a desired outcome, aim, or objective. Goal setting can be done in our work life and in other areas of our life such as romantic, family, social, spiritual, and health domains, to name a few. We probably all know people who think less about goals or more about them, and we may know some individuals who seem to merely drift through life without any goals. Generally speaking, the research shows that *setting* goals is helpful in actually *achieving* goals and living a good life. In fact, Dr. Albert Einstein, the famous scientist, is credited with saying 'If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things' (French, 1980, p. 32).

With all that said, I have to say that the majority of the patients and clients that we work with show up to work with us with a poor idea of their goals! Think about it yourself – when is the last time you explicitly set a goal to achieve something? Many of us get busy, caught up in just trying to make it through the day, running from one thing to the next, barely keeping our head above water. This is not a very mindful or sustainable way to live, and unfortunately, many of us are in this kind of loop without any idea of how to get out of it. This chapter will help you understand why pausing and making the effort to set meaningful and realistic goals and work toward them intentionally can be so helpful.

We often think of setting goals as part of what we do when we are planning something, like to quit smoking, or to lose weight. Few of us may realize that there is actually a great deal of research and science associated with setting and meeting goals! In fact, there is something called 'goal-setting theory' that is based on empirical research and has been called one of the most important theories in organizational psychology (Miner, 2003). Psychologists Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham are generally referred to as the fathers of goal-setting theory, and have compiled a comprehensive review of the core findings of the theory (Locke & Latham, 2002). The bottom line is that Drs. Locke and Latham found that setting goals is an important activity because goals impact performance in the following positive ways (Locke & Lantham, 2002):

1 Goals direct attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities
2 Difficult goals lead to greater effort
3 Goals increase persistence, with difficult goals prolonging effort and
4 Goals indirectly lead to stimulation and approach behavior, and to discovery and use of task-relevant knowledge and strategies

In their research, Locke and Latham (2002) found that not only is it important to set goals, but that specific, difficult goals lead to higher performance than either easy goals or telling yourself to just 'do your best.' This holds true if the goal is considered important to the person who sets it and if the person is committed. They report that self-efficacy also enhances goal commitment (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Again, self-efficacy is a handy thing to have and grow! Additionally, they propose that for goals to be effective, people need feedback about their progress in relation to their goal (Stajkovic et al., 2006).

If you think about it, these are very interesting findings! This body of research basically says that setting specific goals instead of general ones is more effective and that the difficulty of the goal is positively related to performance such that, the harder the goal, the greater the effort, focus, and persistence, which results in higher performance (Locke, 1968; Mento et al., 1987). This is extremely important knowledge for people wanting to achieve more and live a better life, but it is the antithesis of the beliefs that most of us seem to hold.

Goals can be long-term, intermediate, or short-term. It is important to remember that goals can be as small, straightforward, and simple as determining that you want to say 'hello' to someone, or say 'no' to a request from someone, or to do something like brush your teeth. These are often the day-to-day goals that make up our everyday life. Of course, we may also have larger goals such as to find a partner and get married, get a job, ask for a pay raise, etc., and these can only be achieved by setting and achieving multiple small goals that work toward these larger goals.

Setting Realistic Goals: Focus on What You Can Control

Obviously, before an individual can set out to achieve a goal, they must first decide what their desired end-state will be – what they want to do or produce. Understanding how people do this has been a focus of the work by psychologist Dr. Peter Gollwitzer, who is a professor of psychology at

New York University. According to Dr. Gollwitzer's mindset theory of action, there are two phases that a person must go through if they wish to achieve a goal (Gollwitzer, 2012). In the first phase, the person must cognitively select a goal by specifying the criteria (that is a fancy way of saying that the person has to think about what it will mean to literally achieve the goal) and examining their commitment to achieve this goal (how motivated are they to achieve the goal). In the second phase, the person has to decide which set of behaviors are at their disposal that will allow them to reach their desired goal (Gollwitzer, 2012).

We can think of these two phases in plain language as:

1. Intentionally set realistic and attainable goals that are in line with your values, and
2. Determine and construct interpretations, thoughts, and behaviors that will help facilitate achievement of that goal

Setting a goal is the first step to making it happen. It is the first step toward success. It's when you switch from a passive state to being involved in life, and focusing on what you want and can achieve. In order to move forward you have to be intentional about setting your goals, and to set goals that are realistic, attainable, challenging, and based on your values! Easy, right?

Being intentional about setting realistic goals can be harder than it sounds, and may be a big reason why some people don't do it. Part of the problem may be that we human beings tend to worry a lot! We worry about many things – our physical health, relationships, and even global politics, the weather – you name it. All these worries can be summed up and represented as being in what author and business expert, Dr. Stephen Covey refers to as our circle of concern. Dr. Covey obtained an M.B.A. from Harvard and a doctorate from Brigham Young University, where he was professor of organizational behavior and business management until his death in 2012, but he may be best remembered as the author of the top-selling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* published in 1989. According to Covey, the circle of concern is a circle that represents all the worries and concerns a person might have. These include personal concerns about health, and larger concerns such as the economy, potential wars, climate change, natural disasters, and more. These concerns are typically unique to the individual although some of the concerns may be shared by the larger community. There are, of course, other things that we worry about that we actually have more control over, and Dr. Covey refers to these things as being within our circle of control or influence. These would be things that concern us and that we may have more control over – like what we say to people, or if we floss our teeth – in other words, our own actions, thoughts, and behaviors (see Figure 6.1).

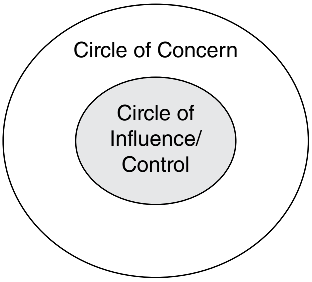

Figure 6.1 Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence/Control

If you think about it, much of what we face in our day to day lives can be placed in one of these two big buckets – things we can do something about, and things that we can't. Those things we can do something about, we can problem-solve or control. It might be hard, we might not want to do it, but we literally have the ability to do something about it – we can floss our teeth, do our homework, go to the grocery store. The other bucket might contain things that we are just as concerned about, but we can do very little or nothing about – the weather on our wedding day, or if our flight will be on time. Addressing this bucket requires a different set of skills that are more about coping or not making things worse. Sometimes we may start in one bucket – doing what we can about an issue, and then need to switch over to the skills in the other bucket and learn to cope. For example, if you are concerned about maintaining your physical health, you can focus on what you can control, such as eating healthy, exercising regularly, and trying to reduce stress. However, there comes a point where you cannot control everything about your health, such as your genetics or whether you catch a flu virus at work. At this point, it is wise to switch from a problem-solving mindset to a coping frame of mind or what some call emotion-focused coping.

Most of us do not think about setting goals as a way to reduce worry, but it certainly can be an effective method to reduce anxiety! This is especially true when setting goals helps you become more aware of what is under your control to change and what is not. Intentionally going to the neutral place on the interpersonal circle can help you see more clearly both what is happening around you and how you are reacting to it, as well as what is possible and what is not. This neutral position on the interpersonal circle is essentially an interpersonally mindful state of being that you can intentionally cultivate in order to be able to 'see the bigger picture' interpersonally. Getting to this state of mind then allows you to focus on setting goals that are realistic and attainable in the current actual situation. Doing this allows you to have the where-with-all to set goals that are based on your values. Importantly, you can set goals that are within your circle of influence – meaning that they may be challenging and are still achievable.

Focusing on what you have control over and what matters to you, and then taking positive action, can help you achieve your realistic and attainable goals in the moment. Interestingly, doing this exercise also allows you to more clearly identify what is not achievable in the situation or what is not under your immediate control. Knowing this can allow you to intentionally tell yourself that you cannot change the situation or achieve the goals you would like, and this knowledge can then help you realize that you can let that unrealistic or unattainable goal go. You may then be able to simply set it aside and focus on a different realistic and attainable goal, or you may shift into coping mode and try to employ coping strategies to get through a situation, or not make it worse. Doing either of these will invariably help reduce worrying over things that you can do nothing about.

There is a wonderful quote that many people may know as the 'serenity prayer.' The serenity prayer is a phrase that has become commonly known through its use by Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs, as well as in popular media. The modern version of this quote goes something like this:

> God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

The modern version is attributed to the American theologist and pastor, Reinhold Neibuhr, but it is possibly based on a series of sayings dating back to ancient times (Shapiro, 2014). This saying is a nice quick way to remember that life contains both things we can control and things that we cannot and that differentiating the two is an important skill. In fact, there is nothing more frustrating and worrisome than trying to change something that you cannot change. Have you ever had a conversation with someone where you just want support – you want to vent, or complain, or just be validated, and the other person keeps trying to give you advice and problem solve for you?

Kim's Story

Early in our marriage, my husband and I were both working very long hours in jobs that were stressful. He was a resident physician and worked at the same university hospital where I worked as a clinical psychologist fellow. We were both in training, and so worked long hours with few breaks, got paid very little, and were the lowest on the academic health system totem pole, which translated into being treated like shit. We also both worked with other people and supervisors who were, let's say, not very supportive. We got into the habit of coming home at night, tired, hungry, and stressed and asking each other about our days. We would then start complaining to each other. We would share the worst of the day, complain about the lack of support, and share our frustrations about all the things that went wrong. What we quickly found out is that instead of feeling better, we both felt more frustrated and upset. We eventually realized that when we vented, we were not letting each other just get things off our chests, but instead, we were still in problem-solving mode from work. I would complain about how unsupportive and rude my supervisor was, and my husband would say, 'You just need to stand up to him and let him know that he is not being professional!' or 'You need to go to the big boss and tell them what is happening.' I, of course, had either already tried these things, or felt like they were not a good option. So, I then found myself at the end of the day defending myself and explaining this to my husband and then he would become more frustrated saying that he was 'only trying to help.' We both ended up feeling more stressed and frustrated!

What we finally figured out is that just dumping our frustrations and feelings out to each other at the end of the day was not very productive. We both were venting and were not at all clear about what we wanted to achieve. We were both on the hostile side of the interpersonal circle and pulling more of the same from each other because our goals were not clear. I was thinking, 'Just listen to me and be on my side!' but my husband was trying to problem-solve for me and was getting frustrated himself because he felt that I was rejecting his suggestions. Helping someone problem-solve when they want to share or just vent is not very productive and actually very frustrating to both people. You can think of it visually as both people being on the hostile side of the circle and reacting to each other in ways that keeps both people in the hostile arena. This is not because we are both mean or bad people, or that we wanted to hurt each other, but because this is the complimentary pull. Remember, hostile pulls hostile – that is just the way people work. We still wanted to talk to each other – to share about our day, but we needed to find a way out of the hostile loop we could slip into. We needed a goal. Specifically, we needed to define what we each wanted, and needed to make it clear to ourselves and each other.

Eventually we came up with a solution. We decided that we need to be very explicit and intentional with ourselves and each other, especially because we were often tired, drained emotionally, and not always our sharpest at the end of the day. We determined that we needed to clearly state to each other if we just needed to vent and receive support or if we needed help problem-solving something that was bothering us and that maybe could be changed or at least improved. In other words, we determined that we needed to go to the neutral mind-set, recognize the situation and the pull toward hostile, and then assertively state what we each needed clearly. We could then state if we just wanted to vent about something that could not be changed, in which case, the other person knew they could go to submissive – friendly and be supportive. We could also state if we needed help in addressing a situation that *could* be changed, in which case the other person knew they would be most helpful by being in the neutral place to help see things in a balanced way or they could be in the assertive domain, in which case they could offer effective problem-solving strategies without frustrating the other person.

This one small change made a huge difference! It didn't take away all the stressors of the day, for sure, and yet it did help us feel more empowered. By being intentional and going to the neutral interpersonal mindset, we could more clearly see what was happening emotionally and interpersonally – we were both getting pulled over into the hostile side of the interpersonal circle and staying there! By 'going to neutral' and then stating clearly what each needed, we felt more empowered, less like a victim and more connected with our partner. We also often set time limits for the venting sessions as well as problem-solving, in order to ensure that we always had a clear goal and stopping point. This allowed the evening to proceed with less stress and frustration and more predictability.

Going to Neutral

Being able to 'get to neutral' is the first step in building the ability to set realistic and attainable goals and then ultimately achieve them! As we discussed in Chapter 5, going to an interpersonally neutral place is very mindful and allows a more realistic appraisal of the situation which then allows you to set goals that are appropriate and achievable. This, of necessity, allows you to also acknowledge goals that you may wish for, but that are not achievable or realistic at the present moment. These may be things like wanting everything to go your way, or to have people like you all the time.

Realistic and attainable goals are ones that are both of concern to you and under your influence. They are important to you and you can do something about them. These may be things like what you say and do, how you respond to others, as well as how you want to feel or think. While the circle of concern encompasses all the concerns a person has, the circle of influence is a *subset* of the circle of concern, and includes the concerns one has influence over. It is important to remember that any person's circle of influence is *smaller* than their circle of concern. Said another way, it is not unusual for our bucket of things that we cannot control to be fuller than our bucket of things we can control. That is, we have many more concerns and worries that we can do nothing about, and fewer issues that we can actually change. The smaller circle of influence or bucket of things you can control represents all the things you have power over. These are what you can change and improve upon.

Ideally, we can work to expand our circle of influence in order to pursue a more fulfilling life. The size of your circle of influence largely depends on how you view yourself and how much responsibility you take on in your own life. The ratio of your circle of concern and circle of influence is generally dependent on your level of proactivity and reactivity. A small circle of influence is a characteristic of reactive people, i.e., those who wait for the right moment or opportunity to appear before they take action. Reactive people wait for things to happen and then react to them. On the other hand, proactive people tend to have larger circles of influence or control.

Proactivity

Proactivity is a concept that has become an important concept in the executive world and is typically studied by professors like Thomas Bateman, D.B.A. who is a Bank of America Eminent Scholar at the McIntire School of Commerce at the University of Virginia. Professor Bateman has a particular expertise in leadership, proactive behavior, and motivation and in the past few years, he has applied these interests to the domain of climate change. He states that proactivity can be defined as an action in anticipation of future changes, needs, or problems and even describes it as a kind of superpower! Proactivity puts you in an active state of mind and sharpens your perception of the world around you. Bateman and his colleague, Michael Crant, Ph.D., a professor of management at Notre Dame, propose that proactivity is not something you're born with and that it is an acquired skill that *everyone* can learn (Bateman, 2017). They even developed a scale to measure proactivity called the proactive personality scale (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

Drs. Bateman and Crant (1993) feel strongly that improving proactivity helps promote a good life and they offer three ways to become more proactive:

1 Set a goal that is important to you. *Sound familiar*
2 Stop procrastinating. You can do this by visualizing the completed goal. You can also share your goal with a good friend or partner and make yourself accountable. Remember to reward yourself for each completed objective along the way
3 Learn to say no. You may have to decline other opportunities in order to focus on achieving your set goal

You can see how increasing proactivity can help expand your circle of influence. The more proactive a person is, the bigger their circle of influence is relative to their circle of concern. In fact, proactivity is the number one habit of successful people in Covey's book (1989). The goal is to maximize the circle of influence through the development of proactivity. In Chapter 7, we will discuss strategies that can help increase the likelihood of setting and working toward achievement of your realistic and attainable goals that are based on your own values.

Values-Based Goals

Values are defined as a person's principles or standards of behavior. Values are traits or qualities that are considered worthwhile. They are your own judgment of what is important in life. Your values are based upon everything that has happened to you in your life and they include influences from your parents and family, your religious or spiritual beliefs and experiences, your friends and peers, your education, and more. Once defined, values have an impact on every aspect of your life. They form the foundation for your decision making and your relationships with other humans. It is no wonder then, that values play a large role in the success of setting and achieving goals. A way to increase your functioning in any area of your life is to create goals based on your values. A great way to explore your values is to make your own values-based mission statement. If you think about it, we all can come up with what is important to us in our lives, such as family, education, honesty, loyalty, success, etc.

What I encourage people to do is to take the time to think about their values and intentionally make a mission statement for themselves. The statement can be for your approach to life, work, relationships, etc. and can change over time and based on circumstances. Your personal mission statement may be similar to a mission statement you might see for a company, hospital, or other organization. For instance, Morgan's boyfriend, Stuart, works for the outdoor equipment company, Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI). He was attracted to the company based on their mission statement which is 'We inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime of adventure and stewardship.' REI's mission ties their employees to a love of the outdoors, sustainability, and healthy living and that meant something positive to Stu.

Writing your own personal mission statement can help you define your main values. Personal mission statements can act as a compass to guide you in specific interpersonal interactions and help you set meaningful goals. It is like having a framework or guideline for decision making, so that when you come to a decision point, you have a structure to use for making choices that will align with what is important to you and what you value in your life. Like many things worth doing, coming up with your mission statement takes intention, time, and effort. I guarantee it is worth it!

Any personal mission statement you write will be specific to your individual style, needs, situation, and time of your life. There is no set template, but you do want to make sure and include your personal values, goals, and methods for achieving the goals. An example might be my own personal mission statement I had for writing this book:

> I believe that people can be helped by learning about strategies to help their common problems and stressors in life, and I wish to help other people address these common psychological issues. I will do

> this by using my writing skills and time to write a book that I believe will help others in this way.

The first sentence has been part of my mission statement even prior to beginning to write this book. For example, when I am working with patients I still have the first sentence of the mission statement and the second sentence is 'I will do this by using my therapeutic skills to help patients address their psychological issues.'

Some additional examples of mission statements are:

> I value honesty and thus will be honest in my dealings and interactions with others at work, in my personal life and in the larger community.
> I will do this by being faithful, keeping my word, and not cheating.
> I wish to be compassionate to others and myself, because this is a value of mine.
> I will do this by practicing compassion meditations regularly, assuming positive intent of others, and kind being to myself.

Setting and knowing your values through a mission statement is like having a stable anchor for your goals. Research shows that having values-based goals makes it more likely that you will work toward them and achieve them (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Additionally, living your values can help you feel more authentic and give you a sense of purpose in life!

Realistic and Attainable Goals

If someone is not having success in achieving their goal, it is often because they either have not set a goal, the goal is not in line with their values, or the goal is not realistic or attainable at the current time. All of these issues are common, and if you are unhappy and feeling as if you are confused about why you are not effectively problem-solving, it is often related to one of these issues. I have spoken with people who seem to spend much of their time reacting to situations instead of proactively setting goals. Many of us are so busy just trying to make it through the day, that we do not think to pause and focus on what we want to have happen or even what we are trying to achieve. I once had a patient say to me that his life was like jumping in a river and just trying to keep his head above water. He was exhausted, confused, and rarely achieved his goal despite working very hard. However, once he learned strategies to become a better problem-solving, he described the change by saying that 'it was as if [he] now could walk up to the river with a goal to get to the other side, and a plan for how to enter the river and swim across to that location on the other side.' He went on with the analogy that sometimes it was hard to jump in the river, and of course, he needed to learn how to swim better, and sometimes he got to the other side, but at a different location. All of these things are true, and the point is that he had a much better chance of getting to the goal if he had a realistic goal and a doable plan!

Achieving the goal is important, but it is not the most important thing – being intentional, owning your own goals, plans, and actions of proactivity are the most important aspects of living a good life. Some people may set goals, but then realize that they have set a goal that is not realistic, attainable, based on their values, or appropriate in the specific situation. For example, a goal of clarifying why certain operating room supplies have been discontinued at the hospital, is realistic, but it is not an appropriate or realistic goal for a surgeon who is actively in the middle of performing surgery on a patient. It may, however, become an appropriate goal after the surgery is completed. Making sure that your goals are realistic and attainable is a life skill and takes honesty with self and others. Realistic means that you reasonably think that you can make the goal happen – that it is in your circle of influence. Attainable means that the environment, including other people, can produce the goal. This means that having goals like, 'I want everyone to know what I need,' is unattainable because other people do not have the ability or perhaps even the desire, to read your mind or provide you all that you need.

It is easy to forget about setting realistic or attainable goals in situations. Not having a goal in mind puts you at risk for reacting to others instead of responding intentionally and working toward an appropriate and achievable goal. Additionally, we know that people are at risk of setting goals that are not realistic or attainable. Unrealistic or unattainable goals must be acknowledged and revised in order to move forward. Setting goals that are not realistic or too big and overwhelming is a major reason that people procrastinate! You can probably remember a time when you had a goal – something like, 'I'm going to clean up my apartment!' and then you had a hard time even getting started because it felt so overwhelming and impossible. Eventually, you may not start a project and give up before you even started, just because you do not have a realistic or attainable goal in mind. A helpful thing to do is to intentionally think about what your goal is prior to entering into an interaction and then explore in your own mind if this is something that you think you have control over, something that you can reasonably do, and that the environment can produce. If these are not the case, think about what is the next most important, urgent, and achievable goal in the situation and work toward that end. You may also find it helpful to imagine where on the interpersonal circumplex you need to be to help move toward achieving this goal.

What You Can Do Now

Setting value-based goals helps us to focus our limited energy and resources, form viable plans, and live a purpose-centered life. Working toward these goals can give us a feeling of accomplishment. One thing you can do for yourself now is to seriously set an intention to create and work toward your own value-based goals. There are many techniques and structured methods to set such goals and we present one simple, straightforward strategy. The plan below is inspired by the work of Dr. Stephen Covey, the psychologist who wrote '*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*' and follows steps similar to making your own mission statement (Covey, 1989). Remember that doing this exercise does require time, effort, and intention and will be worth it!

- First write out a short list of beliefs and values that have shaped your life. This can be belief in hard work, importance of family, health, etc. You do not need dozens of these – just a few significant ones will do
- Think about which of the values on your list are important to you now in your daily life and circle them. You can also put a star beside the most significant to you right now
- List your current specific goals, including at home, work, in relationships, family, health, physical, spiritual, etc. These might be to pay a bill, take my medication every day, exercise three times a week, be home for dinner five nights a week, or finish your college degree
- You then divide the listed goals into what you consider to be urgent or not urgent. Urgent goals might be driven by time (I need to pay my bill to avoid penalties) or importance (I need to take my medicine to stay healthy). Goals that may be less urgent may be those where the stakes are not as high or there is less of an urgency in time
- You can now take your lists and further divide the urgent and nonurgent lists into what is important and what is not important. The decision of importance is up to you and is based on your current important values that you have circled and starred. Goals that are congruent with or supportive of your values are, by definition, important. Again quoting from Stephen Covey: 'The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing'
- When moving forward with your goals, you can now focus on what is important and urgent, then move to important and not-so-urgent. Try to reduce the time and energy you spend on nonimportant, nonurgent items and focus on those that have meaning and are based on your values

What You Can Do for a Colleague

Learning how to think about life as a series of goals is an extremely helpful tool for anyone, and especially for young people! A way you can help a colleague is to help them learn to set what are called 'SMART' goals. While the acronym SMART is currently widely-used, it was first known to appear in George T. Doran's November 1981 issue of Management Review. George Doran was a less-well-known consultant and former

Director of Corporate Planning for Washington Water Power Company who built his ideas upon the original work of the organizational psychologist, Dr. Edwin Locke in the late 1960s. While there are various interpretations to the meaning of the different letters of the acronym, for our purposes we will determine these letters to mean specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. We'll review an example of how this works below:

- Specific – You're more likely to stick to and ultimately achieve a goal if it's specific – vague, lofty goals aren't often easy to envision accomplishing or to achieve at all. For example, instead of setting a vague goal to 'become healthier,' try re-envisioning that goal as something more specific, like drinking 80 oz of water every day
- Measurable – It'll also be easier to evaluate your progress and see how far you've come once you've accomplished your goal when it is measurable! For example, for your goal of drinking 80 oz of water every day, you can measure your progress by tracking your water consumption in a journal or downloading an app where you'll record the amount of water you've consumed each day. You may also want to invest in a water bottle that has specific measurements (like a 40 oz water bottle) so that you know exactly how much water you've consumed at the end of the day
- Attainable – Ultimately, large goals are made up of smaller, more attainable goals. That's why the key to achieving your biggest goals are to set smaller, more attainable goals building up to the ultimate goal you have in mind. So, make sure your goals are attainable – if you want to become healthier, for example, you won't be able to lift 200 pounds or feel more energized overnight. Starting with water intake, as discussed before, can set you on a path to other healthier decisions. If you typically drink more soda and less water, an attainable goal to becoming healthier may be to drink the same amount of water as soda during your day – so, for every 8 oz of soda you drink, consume 8 oz of water. Eventually, you may no longer crave soda as much and your body may become more accustomed to drinking water instead of soda
- Realistic – Consider what is realistic to you as you set your goal. Considering what's realistic doesn't mean being negative or rejecting your goals, but rather it involves planning so that you can actually meet your goal. If you want to become healthier by drinking 80 oz of water every day, think about how you can realistically do that. If you have a busy job where you may not have many water breaks, for example, consider drinking 15 oz of water right when you wake up, 15 oz of water with each meal, and 15 oz of water before bedtime. You can always start with a smaller amount and build up from there, too. If you're able to carry a water bottle with you during the

day, that may also be a helpful way to realistically ensure that you're meeting your goal

- Timely – A goal without a deadline is like a plan without an execution date. While sometimes due dates can be daunting, it's important to set them in order to actually achieve your goals. Be realistic and attainable when setting a deadline for your goal – for example, maybe check in with yourself after a week of water-drinking to see what went well and what could be improved, or try to go a whole month, checking off dates in your journal, app or calendar. Once you've reached your deadline, you can reassess your goal and make any changes necessary to continue achieving it moving forward – or, maybe, it'll become part of your lifestyle and you can build up your next smaller goal to ultimately achieve what you want

Just a little caveat for those overachievers out there – this suggested acronym doesn't mean that every objective written will have all five criteria. If you can achieve your goals with fewer, that is just fine! If you keep setting and working toward realistic and attainable goals, it is almost impossible to live anything but a good life!

Exercise for Goal Setting

Listing What You Can Do; Letting Go What You Cannot

For this exercise, you'll want either a pen and paper or some other way to take notes. Start by taking three deep breaths, your hand over your heart center. Envision a situation in your life that may be challenging to you at some level – perhaps you've been tasked with a difficult assignment at work, or you're having trouble finding motivation to get into an exercise routine, for example. Once you've envisioned your challenge, think about the aspects of the situation you can control. For example, if tasked with a difficult assignment at work, you could list the fact that you can break the big task into multiple smaller tasks. You may also be able to schedule aside time at work or at home to work on this task. Once you've listed what you can control, you can list the items you cannot control and must let go. For example, you may not be able to control the quantity of data you may need to research, or the behavior of a negative colleague with whom you must collaborate on the project. List these items in a separate column or section, and pause a moment to take three deep breaths. Look again at the list of items you cannot control, and write the words 'Let it go' next to these items, repeating either aloud or in your head the phrase. Do this until you've written the phrase next to each item you cannot control, and take three deep breaths once more. Remind yourself of this exercise or re-visit the list whenever you need to practice identifying what you can control and what you must let go.

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7 All Problems Have Solutions!

Problem-Solving

So many people have so many problems and as a clinical psychologist, I hear about these problems daily! As we discussed in Chapter 6, figuring out which problems are ones that you can begin to address is an important first step in improving your life. The next big step is to approach these problems with a plan and begin to solve them skillfully! This is not always easy, and many people need help to figure out how to move toward their goals once they set them. This movement toward achieving goals has been studied by psychologists and social scientists working in a variety of areas including healthcare, mental health, psychotherapy, business, organizations, and learning and education. In this chapter, we present some of the scientific and applied work in this area and share stories of effective problem-solving.

Problem-solving skills are SO important! Why, you might ask? Part of the answer is that we will ALL have to solve problems and make decisions throughout our lifetimes. Whether you're a student, a parent, a businessperson, a hedge-fund baby, an employee, employer, unemployed, the president of a small company or large company, or the president of a nation, you face problems every day that need to be solved. As Dr. Karl Popper, one of the most influential 20th century philosophers of science, once succinctly stated, 'All life is problem solving' and, indeed, this is the title of his 1999 book about the topic. Problem-solving skills are the basis for continuous improvement, effective communication, and accurate learning. The ability to solve problems is a basic life skill and is essential to living a good life.

Problem-solving is a subset of critical thinking skills and employs a good deal of the same strategies. The goal of problem-solving is to come up with correct solutions to well-constructed and identified problems and work toward achieving realistic and attainable goals. Problem-solving often requires a process of coming up with solutions by using more than the old or traditional methods – many new problems need new solutions! Thus, problem-solving is often conceptualized as a creative process. The process of problem-solving is what we use to understand what is happening in our environment, identify things we want to change, and then figure out the things that need to be done to create the desired outcome. Creative problem-solving is the source of new inventions, social and cultural evolution, and some even argue, the basis for market-based economies (Nyarko, 2006).

Problem-solving is the process of observing what is going on with yourself or your environment, identifying things that could be changed or improved (noting what is in your circle of control or influence), diagnosing why the current state is the way it is and the factors and forces that influence it, developing approaches and alternatives to influence change, making decisions about which alternative to select, taking action to implement the changes, and observing impact of those actions in the environment.

Humans learn how to solve simple problems from a very early age (learning to eat, make coordinated movements and communicate) – and as a person goes through life, problem-solving skills are refined, matured, and become more sophisticated (enabling them to solve more difficult problems). Problem-solving skills and the problem-solving process are a critical part of daily life of both individuals and organizations. Problem-solving is important both to individuals and organizations because it enables us to exert control over our environment. Developing and refining these skills through training, practice, and learning can provide the ability to solve problems more effectively and over time address problems with a greater degree of complexity and difficulty.

Barriers to Problem-Solving

As in most areas of life, there are barriers or challenges to effective problem-solving, even for people who are very skilled at it. A problem-solving barrier is something that stops people from either approaching a problem or from finding a successful solution to a problem – and both barriers are important to address. These barriers are often caused by emotional or cognitive blocks in the person trying to solve the problem, as well as by social and physical blocks in the environment. Becoming aware of the fact that we all have blocks to problem-solving is important. It is also important to begin to recognize some of your own blocks so that you can begin to overcome them when possible. You can problem-solve some of your own problem-solving blocks!

Getting emotional can be one barrier that makes problem-solving more challenging. If you are too anxious, nervous, angry, or depressed, it can be very hard to problem-solve skillfully. For example, you might be hesitant to suggest a solution because you are feeling so nervous. If not addressed, this situation can lead to people doubting their abilities to problem-solve and then ultimately, avoiding situations where they may have to problem-solve. Overcoming emotional interference is the first step in learning to problem-solve effectively. This can be approached through using strategies to directly identify and address your emotions before you approach a problem. For example, if you are feeling anxious or nervous, you might want to use mindfulness strategies to try and calm and focus yourself before beginning to problem-solve.

Cognitive blocks can come from our ways of thinking about a situation or problem. These are typically unique to individuals and can contribute to how we approach and carry out problem-solving. Cognitions are literally the way we define things to ourselves and they can introduce bias, errors, and result in imperfect solutions. We call these ways of thinking our 'mental set.' This is an unconscious tendency to approach a problem in a particular way. Unsurprisingly, our mental sets are shaped by our past experiences and habits. For example, if the last time your computer froze up you unplugged it for an hour, then plugged it back in, and it worked again, then that might be the only solution you can think of the next time it freezes. Additional mental sets that people have include 'functional fixedness.' This is a special type of mental set that occurs when the intended purpose of an object hinders a person's ability to see its potential other uses. So for example, say you need to open a can of broth but you only have a hammer. You might not realize that you could use the pointy, two-pronged end of the hammer to puncture the top of the can, since you are so accustomed to using the hammer as simply a pounding tool. Irrelevant information is the information that is presented as part of a problem, but which is unrelated or unimportant to that problem and will not help solve it. Typically, it detracts from the problem-solving process, as it may seem pertinent and distract people from finding the most efficient solution.

Placing unnecessary constraints on ourselves is a barrier that shows up in problem-solving and causes people to unconsciously place boundaries on the task at hand. A famous example of this barrier to problem-solving is the nine-dot puzzle originally developed by experimental psychologist, Dr. Norman Maier and made popular by Stephen Covey (Covey, 2004). In this puzzle, there are nine dots arranged in a 3 × 3 square (see Figure 7.1). The solver is asked to draw no more than four lines, without lifting their pen or pencil from the paper, that connect all of the dots. What often happens is that the solver creates an assumption in their mind that they must connect the dots without letting the lines go outside the square of dots. The solvers are literally unable to think outside the box. Can you solve the nine-dot puzzle? The answer can be found at the end of the chapter (See Figure 7.2.).

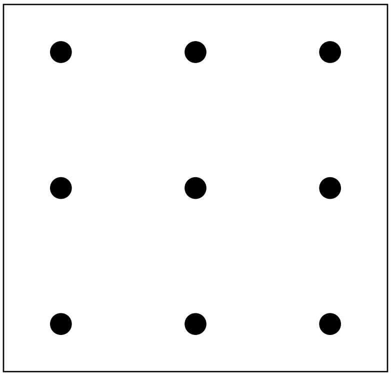

Figure 7.1 Nine-Dot Puzzle

Another barrier to problem-solving is not having adequate or current knowledge to solve a problem. If this is the case, then the priority would be to access the necessary knowledge or skill. For instance, if my car breaks down, I would not be very effective at identifying and solving the problem if I know nothing about the mechanics and workings of the vehicle. If I want to solve the problem of my broken-down car, I need to either learn the skills to diagnose and fix my car, or figure out a way to get help from someone else who has those skills.

Poor communication or expression of problems and solutions is another barrier to effective problem-solving. For example, if I am in France and my car breaks down, I may have significant challenges in problem-solving due to the fact that I am not fluent in French! I would not be able to effectively communicate or express my difficulties due to poor communication skills.

Finally, there are physical and cultural barriers to effective problem-solving. An example of a physical barrier is when you literally do not have access to the tools you may need to problem-solve or when the physical environment interferes with problem-solving, such as having a noisy, crowded working environment or being so hungry and tired that you cannot focus on solving problems beyond eating or sleeping. Many people work in environments with less-than-ideal conditions and with poor access to tools that could help them problem-solve. I think of the exhausted surgeon who has been working for 48 straight hours who does not have the necessary surgical tools, yet is expected to be innovative and problem-solve in order to save a dying patient!

Cultural barriers are embedded in the cultural ethos and biases that exist for us all. These cultural expectations or biases interfere with problem-solving in a variety of ways and each one of us will have our own unique challenges. For example, you may feel less able to voice your thoughts or ideas if you come from a culture where it is encouraged to be reserved or deferential to others. You will have a hard time being quiet and reserved if you come from a culture or background where it is common and encouraged to be outspoken and demanding. One of the keys to overcoming these kinds of barriers is to acknowledge and explore these biases which can then allow you to give yourself permission to move beyond your comfort zone and try new things.

It's important to realize that being a problem-solver isn't just an ability; it's a whole mind-set, one that drives people to bring out the best in themselves and shape the world in a positive way. Rather than accepting the status quo, true problem-solvers are constantly trying to proactively shape their environment. Imagine how different our world would be if leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, Julia Gillard, and Steve Jobs lacked this attitude.

Morgan's Story

In my experience, one of the most effective ways to approach anything in life is to make it fun! I learned this especially through growing up with my parents and grandparents who were goofy and made tasks like shelling green beans and picking weeds silly and fun. Singing was a major thing in my family – and I don't mean just singing in the school or church choir. My parents, and my mom in particular, made up songs with me for just about anything – I found that, as a child, expressing my emotions via silly songs felt good, and looking back, was surprisingly cathartic, although I didn't fully register it as such until later in life. One of the primary songs we sang – besides songs about chickens and losing headbands – was about how 'all problems have solutions.' Any time I'd find myself thrown off with a problem, there would come the typical frustrated or annoyed response, but I learned quickly that if I lightened up, asked someone else for help, and/or simply reminded myself that 'all problems have solutions,' problems would be solved quicker and with far less emotional frustration!

While this simple song may have seemed to be a small reminder of the importance of optimism and seeking solutions, I believe that growing up with this singsong way of approaching problems genuinely helped me to actually become a more skilled problem-solver – particularly when faced with smaller, more inconsequential problems like a coffee stain on a shirt or a late package delivery. As a person, little problems like those don't typically bother me as much as they appear to bother other people. And while this song and approach to problem-solving has helped me majorly to solve problems quicker and more efficiently without frustration, I am still human. Some days, smaller issues seem to put me over the tipping point, and I become frustrated or angry. But when I'm able to take a deep breath and 'take a step back' from the situation, it's usually a bit easier to identify solutions and their outcomes. For example, if a package delivery does not appear on my stoop, I may kindly contact the courier to determine if the package was dropped off at a different address or if the delivery date was moved back. Then I'll either wait a few more days for the package or request that it be re-sent from the courier without worrying about its status or spending more energy than necessary on the issue.

This method of realizing that 'all problems have solutions' works not only for smaller issues but also for big-time, potentially life-altering problems. If I miss an important meeting – or, in one case in college, a final exam that would count for 85% of my final grade – that may affect my performance in work or school, I can take a deep breath, contact an advisor or trusted friend or family member, and determine next steps. Creating an action plan has always been my preferred method to tackle bigger issues head-on – plus, it has helped to lessen my worries and distract me from any initial shock. And, finally, even though this can be extremely challenging with some larger-scale issues, realizing that it's just one decision of millions of decisions one will make in a lifetime can also be helpful. In the case of the missed exam, I was able to jump through the hoops and work with my professor to have it made up and ultimately finished the class with a decent grade. Looking back since that happened five years ago, while it was stressful and embarrassing in the moment, ultimately it didn't alter my life in a huge way. Even if I had failed the class, it would not have counted toward my GPA (given the program I was in at the time), and even if it did, I would still have a pretty good chance of being offered and taking the job I'm currently in, which brings me meaning. While the dilemma did not shift my life hugely, it helped me to prove to myself that I can efficiently problem-solve even under stress and on both small and large scales!

Positive Affect and Problem-Solving

Interestingly, research supports that the positive emotion that Morgan experienced by singing about her problems may have actually helped increase her creative problem-solving skills (Isen et al., 1987). Dr. Alice M. Isen was an American psychologist and Professor of Psychology and of Marketing at Cornell University, who died in 2012. Dr. Isen studied the influence of emotion on social interaction, thought processes, and decision making. Dr. Alice Isen was among the most highly cited business school faculty members in the world. Based in large part on her research, we know that people who intentionally do things to create a positive affect or emotion display a different organizational process in problem-solving and a greater efficiency in decision making (Isen, 2001). Recent work suggests that positive affect facilitates flexibility and integration in problem-solving (Isen & Labroo, 2003).

Isen found that positive emotions facilitate creativity, successful problem-solving, and negotiation, as well as thoroughness and efficiency during the decision-making process (Isen, 2001). She and her colleagues also discovered that these effects apply to the problem-solving strategies of professionals, such as physicians, in clinical problem-solving situations (Isen & Young, 1991; Isen, 2002). It is not completely clear why this is, but the most recent hypothesis is that positive affect is associated with increased brain dopamine levels. The idea is that creative problem-solving is improved, in part, because increased dopamine release in the anterior cingulate part of the brain improves cognitive flexibility and perspective taking ability (Ashby et al., 1999). Additionally, another idea called the 'broaden-and-build hypothesis,' drawn from the broaden-and-build theory of social psychologist, Dr. Barbara Fredrickson (2004), posits that by providing a respite from chronic stress, positive affect increases individuals' attention and motivation, thereby leading to improved coping and problem-solving (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

We will discuss the broaden-and-build theory more in Chapter 9, but to help clarify how to actually increase feelings of positive emotion, we will describe here some strategies used in positive psychology. There is research support to demonstrate that positive mood can be induced (Ogedegbe et al., 2012; Peterson et al., 2012). You can increase positive emotion on purpose. Typical effective techniques used to increase positive affect include asking people to notice things that made them happy and express gratitude in some manner and naming or listing sources of pride through self-affirmations (Charlson et al., 2007). Whatever theory underlies why positive emotion helps in getting to the goal, it seems clear that having a positive mood when trying to problem-solve certainly is a more pleasant experience for everyone involved!

Proactivity, Problem-Solving, and Meaning

As we discussed in the previous chapter, proactivity is about initiating change and solving problems. Proactivity or proactive behavior is defined in organizational behavior psychology and industrial/organizational psychology, as anticipatory, change-oriented, and self-initiated behavior in situations (Adam & Ashford, 2008). Proactive behavior involves taking control and making things happen rather than just adjusting to a situation or waiting for something to happen.

In a related meaning, the 1946 book *Man's Search for Meaning* brought the term to the wider public domain. The author, Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Dr. Viktor Frankl, used the word to describe a person who took responsibility for his or her life, rather than looking for causes in outside circumstances or other people. Dr. Frankl practiced medicine during the period leading up to and including World War II. He is the founder of logotherapy, a form of psychotherapy that he developed after surviving Nazi concentration camps in the 1940s. After his experience in the camps, he developed a theory that humans can endure hardship and suffering by continuing to search for meaning and purpose in life. 'Logos' is the Greek word for meaning, and logotherapy involves helping a patient find personal meaning in life. Dr. Frankl based logotherapy on a few key philosophical premises including the assumption of human free will and a need for striving for goals we can accomplish – what he termed a 'will to meaning.' He also believed that experiencing true love can help us achieve a will to meaning!

Dr. Frankl believed that there is always meaning in life. Meaning is always there, and the key is to find it. He believed that suffering is a part of life, and that man's ultimate freedom is his ability to choose how to respond to any set of given circumstances, even the most painful ones. Dr. Frankl stressed the importance of courage, perseverance, individual responsibility, as well as awareness of the existence of choices, regardless of the situation or context. He believed that every human has a healthy core that we can help each other find, and that although life can offer purpose and meaning, there is no guarantee of fulfillment or happiness. Dr. Frankl proposes that meaning in life can be found by creating a piece of work or doing a deed, experiencing something or someone, or by the attitude we intentionally take toward unavoidable suffering. Finding meaning, even in the most painful situations, is the focus of logotherapy and Dr. Frankl promoted techniques such as thinking of others, approaching a difficult or feared situation instead of avoiding it, and self-discovery to help find meaning. These certainly are strategies that we can all use today to help find meaning in our lives!

Means-End Thinking

The pursuit of proactivity aligns well with another strategy to help set and achieve meaningful goals. This strategy is sometimes referred to as 'means-end thinking' or 'means-end analysis.' Means-end thinking is the ability to orient oneself to and conceptualize the means of moving toward a goal, and it is crystalized during adolescence. In means-ends analysis, the idea is to begin by envisioning the end goal, or ultimate goal, and then determine the best strategy for attaining it. Variants of means-end thinking approaches have been used in developing artificial intelligence (Simon, 1981), conducting consumer research (Kaciak & Cullen, 2006) and even promoting creativity (Bhattacharya, Wang, & Xu, 2010). So we've seen that means-end thinking is one of the many tools that can be used to achieve in life!

Problem-Solving Therapy

Means-end thinking is thought to be necessary for adequate social adjustment. As such, it has been incorporated into systems for learning effective social-emotional problem-solving skills in psychotherapeutic interventions (D'Zurilla & Nezu, 1999; McCullough, Jr., 2000). One such psychotherapy approach is called Problem Solving Therapy (PST), developed initially by Dr. Thomas D'Zurilla and augmented by his student, Arthur Nezu. Dr. Art Nezu is currently a Professor of Psychology at Drexel University and further expanded PST in collaborations with his wife and clinical psychologist, Christine Nezu, who is also a Professor of Psychology at Drexel. Together these three psychologists have researched PST and developed training and handbooks for this effective therapy approach (Nezu, Nezu, & D'Zurilla, 2013).

Problem Solving Therapy works by teaching people skills to help them take a more active role in their lives, taking more initiative, and utilizing whatever influence they have to effectively make decisions and achieve their goals. The major treatment goals of PST are to help people develop a more adaptive worldview or approach orientation toward problems and to improve their specific problem-solving abilities. The core goals of PST will sound familiar. They are listed below and hopefully you can see how they are strongly related to increasing proactivity as well as effective problem-solving. They include:

1 Help people learn to approach problems differently and with more self-efficacy
2 Teach people to clearly define problems. People may not be able to solve the problems they face because they cannot clearly define what the actual problem is
3 Teach people how to brainstorm and evaluate solutions
4 Help people take action by breaking down the problem into smaller steps

Cognitive Behavioral Analysis System of Psychotherapy

Another of the empirically supported psychotherapies to employ a means-end thinking approach is the Cognitive Behavioral Analysis System of Psychotherapy (CBASP) developed by James P. McCullough, Jr., Ph.D. (2000) in the 1970s. Dr. McCullough is a clinical psychologist and Professor Emeritus at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and was Kim's mentor in graduate school. He created CBASP (pronounced Seebasp – not Seabass!) to help the chronically depressed and avoidant person begin to feel safe and learn to approach and problem-solve social and emotional interactions and situations. The CBASP approach was developed to help treat people suffering from persistent depression and has been found to be as effective as antidepressant medications for treating depression and may be twice as effective when combined with antidepressant medications (Keller et al., 2000). It is considered an empirically supported psychotherapy system and further details of the therapy and its empirical support can be found elsewhere (McCullough, Schramm, & Penberthy, 2015; Penberthy, 2019).

For our purposes, we will focus on how the CBASP approach uses a form of means-end thinking to help set and work toward achievement of realistic and attainable goals or 'desired outcomes' and thus increase both proactivity and what Dr. McCullough (2000) calls 'perceived functionality.' Perceived functionality is defined by Dr. McCullough as the ability of individuals to recognize the consequences of their behaviors, thus increasing their understanding of their impact on others and the world around them. In means-ends thinking or analysis, an individual begins by envisioning the end, or ultimate goal, and then determines the best strategy for attaining the goal in the current situation. The goals must be realistic and attainable and can sometimes take effort to determine. 'Realistic' goals means that the individual can produce the result and 'attainable' means that the environment (or other person) can produce the result. It is also encouraged to set goals in line with the person's values.

Once an appropriate goal or desired outcome is set, the idea is to work toward that goal by structuring thoughts, interpretations, motivations, and behaviors toward achievement of the goal. This does not mean that the goal is always met, but it does mean that the individual has a clearly articulated goal for the specific situation and is actively generating and acting on components that will move him/her toward the goal – this is being proactive. Emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and interactions that do not facilitate achievement of the goal are set aside in order to help focus on doing things and structuring thoughts and emotions to help achieve the goal. You can visualize this on the interpersonal circle as being at the neutral part of the circle when you are determining a realistic and attainable goal and then moving into the assertive domains in order to move toward your goal. With the goal in mind, interpretations of the ongoing situation come up and those thoughts and 'reads' that help get to the goal are maintained, while other thoughts or interpretations that do not help get to the goal are dropped. These may be inaccurate thoughts, irrelevant interpretations, or beliefs that are not really grounded in the present moment.

One strategy to help move through means-end thinking is to map it out on paper to get a better understanding. You can set a goal that is within your control. Then list the thoughts, interpretations, reactions, etc. that you have and literally think about whether or not each one helps you move toward your goal. If it does, then draw an arrow from the thought or interpretation to the goal to reinforce what will work to help facilitate your goal. If a thought or interpretation is not directly related to the current situation and goal, if it is not accurate, or if it does not help work toward the goal, then you do not need to spend time focusing on it, and instead can choose to set it aside or revise or change it so that it does help work toward your goal. You may also need to think about adding new interpretations, motivating thoughts, or behaviors in order to help get to your goal. An example of a goal and some helpful and unhelpful thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are below. Can you tell which ones are helpful in working toward the goal and which are not?

1. Set a goal
   Goal: I want to apply for a job
2. Determine if the goal is realistic and attainable and if not, create a goal that is realistic and attainable by focusing on what you can control in the present moment
   It is under my control and I can do it. I cannot ensure I get a job, but I can apply for a job. I can make it even more precise and apply for this one job
3. Generate a list of thoughts, interpretations, emotions, values, and behaviors that arise when you think about moving toward the goal

   Thoughts/Interpretations
   I'm not skilled enough for this job
   I do not have enough experience for this job
   They will judge me and think I am a loser
   I need money
   People who are not working are lazy
   I should have a job by now
   I remember jobs that I did not get
   I remember being fired in the past and how bad it felt
   I will probably fail
   Nobody is hiring these days
   I'll just distract myself with TV
   I'll just have a drink and relax first
   I should just wait and not apply
   I need to update my computer
   I don't have anything to wear to a job interview
   I have to look good physically for the job interview
   I will keep looking for easier jobs
   What do I have to lose
   It is ok if they say no

   Emotions
   I am nervous
   I am scared
   I want to be liked
   I feel embarrassed to not be working
   I am confident I can do the work

Values

I am a loser for not having a job
I am a hard worker
I learn fast and try hard
I am an honest person
I value working
I get along well with people
Making money is important

Behaviors

I go back to bed
I wait until next week to think about applying
I revise my resume
I go ahead and apply

What do I need to think and do in order to work toward this goal?

I can feel angry and think that someone owes me a job
I can feel mad and sad about how I used to have a job
I can think about my next step and how to move forward
I can think that I can do it – I can and will apply for a job
I can think about asking for help and guidance

4 Which of the thoughts, interpretations, or behaviors help facilitate achievement of my goal?

I can think about my next step and how to move forward
I can think that I can do it – I can and will apply for a job
I can think about asking for help and guidance

What is not helpful in working toward this goal?

I can feel angry and think that someone owes me a job
I can feel mad and sad about how I used to have a job

5 If I focus on what is helpful in moving me toward my goal and minimize my focus on unhelpful interpretations and behaviors, I will have a better chance of getting my goal or at least get closer to it! Think about setting value-based goals with thoughts and behaviors that facilitate their achievement and you will see how you can move toward getting your goal or at least getting closer! Furthermore, you will have ownership of why and how you are getting closer to your goal and this will help improve self-efficacy and allow you to be proud of your progress

We all have many thoughts, emotions, and behaviors when setting and working toward a goal and it is important to remember that not all of them will be helpful! If you are stuck and not making progress on a goal, first examine your goal and make sure it is under your control. In the case above, applying for a job online seems to be a goal that is under a person's control. The person will need access to a computer to apply if that is required, or will need transportation to apply in person, and those issues may, in some cases, make applying for a job more challenging. If these obstacles are not a problem, then the second important thing to examine is whether the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are working toward the goal or against it, or if they are irrelevant or inaccurate. Thinking that you will never get the job is not helpful and works against achieving the goal. Thus, this interpretation can be thought of as unhelpful in facilitating the goal of applying. Remembering being fired in the past by a narcissistic boss and how bad it felt is not helpful and is also irrelevant in this context because it is in the past. Having a thought about how working is important to you is helpful and relevant and can motivate appropriate action toward the goal. Thinking 'I have as good a chance of getting this job as anybody else' is another interpretation that is relevant, helpful, and possibly true. Saying 'I can fill out this application!' is a very action-oriented and helpful interpretation and can lead to positive behaviors toward the goal. This kind of interpretation paired with action is what will ultimately lead to achieving goals that you value. Actually completing the job application on your computer to the best of your ability, is a behavior that is very relevant in helping to achieve the longer-term goal of employment.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Another current psychotherapy approach that focuses on goal setting and specifically incorporates value-based goals is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; pronounced 'act'). This approach was created in 1986 by Dr. Steve Hayes, who is a clinical psychologist and a Professor at the University of Nevada, Reno Department of Psychology, where he is a faculty member in their Ph.D. program in behavior analysis. He is known for devising a behavior analysis of human language and cognition called relational frame theory. He has applied this theory to the treatment of psychological disorders and one resulting product is ACT (Hayes, 2004).

The goal of ACT is to increase psychological flexibility, or the ability to enter the present moment more fully and either change or maintain behavior in order to achieve valued goals. I think you see the theme here! In ACT, therapists and patients work to establish psychological flexibility through core processes including acceptance (which is the opposite of experiential avoidance), cognitive defusion (where negative thoughts are observed mindfully instead of avoided or reasoned away), and finally focusing on chosen values and committed action. Again, sound familiar?

ACT is a bit different in that it promotes working toward *acceptance* through a variety of therapeutic interventions as well as focusing on what could be called problem-solving strategies for achieving value-based goals. These ACT interventions focus around two main processes:

1 Developing acceptance of unwanted private experiences which are out of personal control
2 Commitment and action toward living a valued life

ACT focuses on developing psychological flexibility as a method to help improve effective problem-solving and achieve goals that are values-based. There is less of a focus on changing emotion, but instead a focus on acceptance and effective values-guided action. ACT uses some core principles to help people develop psychological flexibility and ultimately take action. The strategies include defusion, acceptance, being in the present moment, observing the self for increasing flexibility. Clarifying values and moving toward committed goal-driven action are the remaining strategies.

Clarifying values is the act of intentionally thinking about what is most important to you, what is significant, and what you want your life to be about. It is very similar to the idea of having a personal mission statement that we discussed in Chapter 6. These values can be about connecting with other people, being authentic, etc. The idea is that making these values explicit to yourself and others helps provide a kind of scaffolding for the next phase of committed action toward the goals. Knowing that you are acting on your values helps to tolerate potential negative emotion or resistance from the environment. The final step in ACT is one of committed action. This involves setting goals that are guided by established values and taking effective action to achieve them. Again, this sounds familiar! ACT focuses on setting a goal that is important and based on the values of the person and then actively encouraging the person to effectively work toward that goal in a stepwise fashion, motivated by their values and less hampered by their negative or unhelpful emotions or thoughts.

Example: Autumn and Sneaky

An interesting example of using means-end thinking happened with a 60-year-old single female group therapy patient named Autumn. Autumn suffered from depression and was very irritable, avoidant, and lonely. She had been invited to a birthday party for a friend, Jaz, who she met through their mutual love of cats. She had visited Jaz and her cat named Sneaky a few times, but was unsure about attending the party which was to be held at Jaz's home. Autumn was not sure if she would have the energy to go and she was worried because she would not know most of the people who would be attending. One of her goals had been to pursue more social support and she knew this would be one way to do so. Plus, she liked Jaz and Sneaky, and wanted to go for them.

Someone from the group asked Autumn why she was so hesitant if these things were true. The group members encouraged her to think about her goals for the party. Autumn paused … she simply said she assumed that she should go and otherwise, she had not thought much about her specific goals or what was important to her. When asked in session, she said she guessed that she wanted it to go well and for people to be nice to her and like her. The group quickly jumped on these unrealistic and unattainable goals and reminded her gently that she did not have control over whether other people like her or not or if they will be nice or not. All she could control, they reminded her, was her own thoughts and actions.

So, I stated, if Autumn did want to go to the party, could she set some behavioral goals that were realistic and attainable and that fit with her values? Together, Autumn, the group members, and I helped Autumn determine some realistic goals for going to the party and also established that these goals were congruent with her values. She wanted to be a loyal friend and to her this meant attending a birthday party. She valued this quality in herself and wanted to honor her friend. Autumn decided that she could go and stay for one hour, and if she felt like staying longer, she could, but she would stay at least one hour. She set an additional sub-goal to talk with her friend, Jaz, and introduce herself to at least one new person. She also had a back-up plan that if she felt too overwhelmed or stressed, she could find Sneaky the cat, and pet her for a few minutes before going back to the party. Autumn said that Sneaky knew her and that petting the cat always calmed her down and allowed her to get to a nice neutral or mindful state of mind where she might be able to refocus and remind herself of her goals. She agreed that she would need to be able to move in-between the neutral place on the interpersonal circle into the friendly assertive place in order to talk with Jaz and introduce herself to another person. She would also need to remind herself of her goals and why she was doing all of this in the first place.

Autumn acknowledged that she might need to tell herself assertive things like ‘Go up and say hello!’ ‘You are being a good friend.’ or ‘You can do this!’ which would be both friendly assertive and also help remind her of her values and motivate her to approach others. Finally, she stated that she would need to practice her assertive behaviors and pay attention to her body language and nonverbal language, because she knew that she would need for her behaviors to be more proactive. She would need to make eye contact, orient herself toward the other person, and speak up. By the end of the group therapy session, Autumn had a solid plan that she felt comfortable with and that she thought she could achieve. The group congratulated her and reminded her that some of the hardest work is setting realistic values-based goals and being honest with yourself.

People who operate using means-end thinking are more able to set and achieve interpersonal goals and be successful in their interpersonal interactions. It is important to remember that means-end thinking, or the ability to orient oneself to and conceptualize the means of moving toward a goal, is crystalized during adolescence and is deemed necessary for adequate social adjustment. Thus, if this process is disrupted by trauma or neglect, problems can arise for people later on (Kleftaras et al., 200). Many people who have difficulties with means-end thinking and proactivity have also suffered such adversities in childhood and adolescence (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). This does not mean that they cannot learn means-end thinking, it just means that it may take a bit more intention and practice.

Means-end thinking is crucial for adequate social functioning and can be practiced in most interactions where goals are set. It is important to think ahead of time about and set realistic and attainable goals, and evaluate if they need to change over time. Focusing thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward the achievement of these realistic and attainable goals helps facilitate achievement in a reliable manner. Thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that do not work toward these goals or are not relevant or helpful in moving toward these goals can be laid aside, and thus reduce unnecessary emotional, behavioral or interpersonal distractions or disruptions toward goal achievement. Laying aside an interpretation or emotion does not mean that you ignore it or deny it, instead you are intentionally not focusing on it because it is not relevant or linked to achieving your current goals. You must be clear about your goal and determine if it is something you have control over or not, and if it is the actual goal that you want to focus on at the current time and situation.

What You Can Do for Yourself

Steps for Means-End Analysis

1 Set a goal of what you want to achieve in your interpersonal interaction and make sure that it is realistic, attainable, and based on your values. That means your goal cannot be to make someone else feel, think, or do something, or to change something that you have no control over

In means-ends analysis, you begin by envisioning the end, or ultimate goal, and then determine the best strategy for attaining the goal. The goal should be realistic and attainable. Realistic means that the individual can produce the result and attainable means that the environment can produce the result. The goal will also ideally be based on your own values. Think about a goal that is important to you. Make sure it is in your circle of control or influence. You might focus on an interpersonal goal.

Once you have a goal in mind that is realistic and fits with your values, you can begin to work toward that goal by structuring thoughts, motivations, and behaviors toward the facilitation of this goal. How can you look at the situation in a way that will help get to your goal? How can you read the situation to move toward the goal? What can you do and how can you behave that is in line with your values and will help get you to your goal? Focus on these and continue to think about what appropriate actions may be necessary to move toward your goal. This does not mean that the goal is always met, but it does mean that you have a clear target and helpful ways of being and thinking to move toward it. Emotions, thoughts, interactions, and behaviors that do not facilitate achievement of the goal are set aside in order to help focus on doing things and structuring thoughts and interpretations that will help achieve the goal.

2 Reevaluate if you are not having success

If you are not having success in achieving the goal, or your communication is not effective, you can examine your goal and determine if it is based on your values and if it is really the goal that you want to pursue at this moment. Often people have goals that are not realistic, attainable, or appropriate for the specific situation and this causes difficulties. Be mindful to set goals for the situation that are appropriate. For example, a goal of clarifying why certain operating room supplies have been discontinued at the hospital, is not an appropriate goal for a doctor who is actively in the middle of performing surgery on a patient, but may become an appropriate goal after the surgery is complete.

3 Think about the interpersonal circle and where you need to be to convey your message to the other person

It is easy to forget about setting realistic or attainable goals in situations, especially with other people. This puts you at risk for reacting to others instead of responding intentionally and working toward an appropriate goal. A helpful thing to do is to intentionally think about what your goal is prior to entering into an interaction and then explore in your own mind if this is something that you think you can control and that the environment can reasonably produce. If these are not the case, think about what is the next most important, urgent, and achievable goal in the situation and work toward that end. You may also find it helpful to imagine where on the interpersonal circumplex you need to be to help move toward achieving this goal. Remember, if you are asking a favor from someone you need to be more assertive and actually *ask*. Additionally, it is often most helpful if you are on the friendly side interpersonally as this will elicit a complimentary friendly response most often. If you are trying to understand another person's point of view, you may need to be more submissive or neutral in your interpersonal stance

> in order to allow them to express thoughts. If you are expressing your own thoughts or emotions to another, if you are trying to tell them how you feel, you need to be on the neutral or dominant side of the circle and preferably on the friendly side a bit. These strategies will help you map out a plan of action for reaching out to another, or standing up for yourself, or even expressing true emotion to another … all of which will help lead to a good life!

What You Can Do for Another

You can help another begin to get into a more optimal emotional place to problem-solve by helping elicit positive emotion. Positive moods have been shown to increase many types of helping behavior, including contributing to charity, donating blood, and helping coworkers (Isen, 1999). It is also relatively easy to put people in a good mood. Focusing on gratitude and counting blessings can instantly improve mood. You can also help improve someone's mood by smiling at them or letting them know you are happy to see them. You can also play music that they like or make them food that they enjoy. Often pleasant smells can improve mood, as can a beautiful scene, exercise, or being outdoors or being with a favorite pet or person. Help another by reminding them that they can choose what to focus on and pay attention to, and they can choose to do something to help improve their mood, not only to feel better, but to help improve their problem-solving skills!

Another great strategy for yourself or another, is to take an index card and in the morning write your goal for the day regarding your values and attitude. What values do you want to live today? What values will guide your plans and help set your goals? Think about this intentionally, jot it down on one side of the card and keep the card with you throughout the day. You can keep it in a pocket or on your desk and look at it during the day. Then at the end of the day, turn the card over and write what you did that was in line with your values and goals for the day. How did you live your values? You can do this exercise yourself or with another. If you do this with another person, it can be very fun and gratifying to share your lived values at the end of the day!

Exercise to Empower

Your Power Pose

When coping with stressful situations, it can be helpful to remind yourself of the things that empower you. While this may be easier said than done, there is one sure-fire way in yoga that'll make you feel empowered and think about how you empower yourself – through your Power Pose. I like to think of one's Power Pose as the yoga pose that builds power and feels strong, which can differ per person. For some, this may be Warrior 2, for example, arms and gaze ahead, with strong legs and a straight back, hips facing the length of the mat. For others, a power pose might look different – like Mountain or Pigeon. The point of a Power Pose is not to choose something impressive or particularly difficult, but rather to identify a yoga pose that helps you feel empowered and grounded in strength – something that feels sturdy.

One way to start may be to take a beginner's or all-levels yoga class, or practice some yoga at home, and take note in your body how you feel:

- What in your body feels strong, powerful, and grounded
- What about this pose feels good
- What, if anything, about this pose feels challenging
- How does your body react when you practice this pose
- How does your mind react when you practice this pose
- What are three sensations that you can identify in this pose? (For example, strength in my spine, stretching in my quads, openness in the heart center)

Even a more relaxing pose, like Child's Pose, may be a right fit for someone who feels grounded and strong while practicing it. Whatever it is, make note of it – maybe write it down in a journal or remind yourself internally of how it makes you feel when you do it

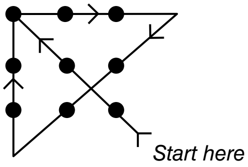

Figure 7.2 Solution to Nine-Dot Puzzle

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8 Life Is Hard: Deal with It!

While Morgan and I were writing this book, we experienced multiple challenges and events that caused distress in our lives and thwarted our work. My husband and Morgan's father, David, had an accident and broke ten bones in his body! He was in the trauma unit and then physical rehabilitation for weeks. Both my father and father-in-law became ill and had surgical procedures and were hospitalized for serious illnesses (both of our mothers have passed away, and thus, the responsibility falls to us for helping our dads), and then… COVID-19 hit the world! Wow, talk about stress and setbacks!

We had planned to write a chapter about coping with difficult people, but the corona virus made dealing with cranky people seem trivial! What has become clear to us during these first two months of the COVID-19 crisis is how overwhelming it can be to have such a significant part of your life move out of your circle of control in such a big way. Thus, we are focusing this chapter not only on dealing with other people whom you cannot control, but also getting through very challenging situations when you have little or no control over the situation and the stakes are high.

It can be very challenging to move forward and cope effectively when emotions are high from either acute or chronic stress. It can be hard to respond in an adaptive manner to rude or hurtful behaviors of others. It can be hard to 'take the high road' interpersonally and not 'take the bait' of another person who is behaving from the hostile side of the interpersonal circle. The stress of a busy workplace, chronic interpersonal negativity, or moral dilemmas can dampen your resilience and ability to cope. Addressing a job loss, serious medical diagnosis, bad news of any kind, can negatively impact your mood and functioning. And certainly, a global pandemic and mandatory social distancing and 'stay at home' orders can make your stress level skyrocket!

The good news is that you do not necessarily need to fix all of these challenges and issues around you – you couldn't, even if you tried. You also do not have to rid yourself of frustration or fear – again, you probably couldn't anyway. What is helpful is to focus on what you do have control over. Focus on what you choose to pay attention to, how you behave, what you say, and your own attitude. You may not always overcome your fears or frustration, but you can move closer to your goals anyway. Importantly, these skills can be learned and enhanced over time with practice. You may not have to eliminate the stress in your environment to improve your coping, just as you do not have to erase your emotions to move forward. As the anonymous modern poet 'Atticus' writes, 'She was powerful not because she wasn't scared but because she went on so strongly, despite the fear' (Atticus, 2017, p. 27).

Kim's Story of Adversity

I was 28 when I became pregnant. David and I had not planned to start a family so soon, but here we were, pregnant with budding careers, so we jumped in ready or not! He was a surgery intern at Bethesda Naval Hospital and I was busy finishing up my doctoral degree in clinical psychology. Now we were going to have a baby and start our family! We were living in Bethesda and I was commuting to Richmond to finish my program at Virginia Commonwealth University. David was working all the time and things were pretty stressful, but we were happy and had the excitement and optimism of people in their late 20s! I was raised in the generation of women where it was assumed that we would have it all – a happy and fulfilling marriage and of course, family life with children, as well as a robust and meaningful career, in addition to friends, exercise, pets, beautiful home, spiritual growth, and of course, community involvement. I was fully caught up in this view of life and stayed busy during my pregnancy with school and work, being present and attentive for my new husband, taking care of the apartment, friends, our extended family.

I was in the 29th week of pregnancy and we were just beginning to think about baby names. I had not seen my parents for a few weeks and had decided to join them for a short visit on the North Carolina coast while David was on call. I was scheduled to drive the four or so hours from Bethesda, Maryland to Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina on a Monday in July and stay for a few days. I was looking forward to spending time with them at the beach and hoping that it would help the headaches that I was having with increasing frequency. I have had migraines since I was a child, and knew those headaches well and could manage them. These new headaches, however, were a more constant, steady, nuisance type of pain. Then, one evening, the headache was worse and I told David about it. I also shared with him that maybe the headache was from needing new glasses. I thought I needed new glasses because I could not see as well anymore – maybe that was making my head hurt? He looked at me alarmed. He saw that I was also swollen in my hands, with my ankles thick and puffy. David composed himself and took my blood pressure with a cuff and stethoscope he had at home. He checked it, shook his head and then rechecked it. 'What is it?' I asked. He would not tell me and stated that he was obviously doing something wrong. He said my blood pressure was 160/100! (That is really high, just FYI!)

He asked me how I felt otherwise, and I said 'Okay.' He said it would be best if I went to the hospital to get checked out before I left for the beach and I agreed to go the next morning first thing. I began to feel my stress level rising. I was nervous and did not feel so good, but tried to focus on getting through the evening and maintaining a schedule. I had to pack and make sure things were in order, then get to bed. The night was uneventful and David left home around 5 am to go to work. I left a few hours later for my appointment with my obstetrician. From that point on things are a bit of a blur. I felt increasingly worse, but nothing that was too alarming. I had headaches my whole life so I was not alarmed by severe headache pain. The swelling in my feet and ankles was honestly the most bothersome for me. It was late July in the DC area and sweltering hot. By the time I got to the appointment and sat in the waiting area, I was very uncomfortable and more swollen than I realized. David came to find me and walked right by me, not recognizing the large swollen pregnant woman in the waiting area. That woman was me!

From that point on everything moved fast. David told the physicians in charge of my care that I had spontaneously listed all of the signs and symptoms of preeclampsia, a dangerous illness of pregnancy. I did not really know much about this, being only 29 weeks pregnant and not in the medical field myself. Preeclampsia, formerly called toxemia, is associated with high blood pressure, protein in the urine, and swelling in legs, feet, and hands. It can range from mild to severe and usually happens late in pregnancy, though it can come earlier or just after delivery. Preeclampsia can lead to eclampsia, a serious condition that can have health risks for mom and baby and, in rare cases, cause death. Women with preeclampsia who have seizures have eclampsia. The only cure for preeclampsia is to give birth. Even after delivery, symptoms of preeclampsia can last 1 to 6 weeks or more.

After a few blood tests and further questions and examinations, the doctors told me that I did indeed have preeclampsia and that they had also discovered that I had a rare blood clotting disorder, which is what was most likely making things worse. I was in danger of having a seizure or of multiple organ failure and death. Additionally, the baby was in increasing distress and danger of not surviving. The only chance to save us both was to have the baby – NOW!

Believe it or not, I remember taking deep breaths … in for four counts, hold for four, breath out for four counts … and reminding myself to stay calm. It was weird, because I think something inside me understood that in order to get through what I was facing, I would absolutely need to remain calm. I went to the neutral place in the interpersonal circle and explored with curiosity what was happening. I remember examining my values and intentionally deciding to think about my goals and how my best self could behave in the current scary and overwhelming situation. What would the calm, competent, wise Kim do in this situation? What did I have control over? I had control over my breathing, my muscle tension, my thoughts, what I focused on, and what I said. I literally visualized myself as a competent, cooperative, calm patient. Serious, but positive. What did I value? I wanted to get through this. I wanted to live. I wanted our baby to not be harmed by my stress. I wanted her to live. Staying calm and cooperative, I focused on being the kind of mom I wanted to be to our daughter. Taking care of myself, so I could take care of her. Despite the pain, I wanted to be engaged and present. I focused on strategies to stay in the moment and stay upbeat and hopeful. I knew enough about the impact of positive emotions and stress to know that I wanted my physiology to work for me not against me! I visualized the beach, the sun, warmth. I let myself be calm and be calmed. I felt the tender touch of my husband and felt his presence as well as the presence of others who were there to help. I felt the presence of others who I knew were praying for me, sending me positive energy and thoughts. There is much more to the story – an epidural that did not take, complications from blood clots and bleeding, a resting tremor for months, but those were on down the line. Throughout the ordeal, I fully committed to staying in the moment, as calm as I could, with an attitude of gratitude and hopefulness and I swear, it got me through the delivery, surgery, and all of it! Grit, resilience, fortitude, intention, whatever you call it, it helped me to not only survive, but thrive!

I am reminded, during the current COVID-19 crisis, about this particular kind of resilience and coping in response to more chronic stress. This is the kind of resilience where staying present and focused in a calm and intentional manner is most helpful. It does not necessarily feel heroic or thrilling and is more like an endurance test than a dramatic dash to the glorious finish line. It is similar to the slow steady effort of getting through a cancer treatment such as chemotherapy or radiation treatment, or the lengthy and challenging endurance needed for ongoing dialysis. What helps is staying in the moment, sometimes literally second to second. Focusing on breathing, on the here and now, and being present with hope, optimism, and determination. Reminding your body and mind that it is strong, capable, and asking it to work with you.

Once it was determined that I would have the baby emergently, I made up a mission statement for myself and for our unborn child: ‘May I be strong, may I be well, I can do this! May our baby be strong, may she be well, she can do this!’ This mantra played in my head and in my heart over and over again. I breathed, I stayed present, and I controlled what I could and focused on what I wanted.

You can also remind yourself of your own mission statement and bring it to mind in challenging and unpleasant interactions or during times of loss or fear. Your mission statement is the guiding value that can help direct your goals. Take a deep breath, remind yourself of your values and strengths, remind yourself of your goals – what you can control and influence – and stick with it! You can do this! You can tackle your fears and potentially grow from encountering stress.

Facing What Is Out of Our Control

Sometimes, despite our best efforts, we run into significant challenges that we cannot change. We run into difficult situations, things we do not want to do or feel poorly equipped to cope with, people who do not agree with us or support us, or things that are flat-out overwhelming to us. These things are perceived as stressors and can cause what psychologists call ‘stress injuries’ that can lead to negative emotions, poor communication, and reduced coping abilities, among other things. It is important to note that there are different kinds and levels of stressors. We can think about stressors as physical, social, spiritual, or emotional and there may be additional categories that you can think of. There are acute stressors that may be very severe and yet are relatively short lived, like being in a major hurricane, giving a speech, or being assaulted. There are also chronic, long-term stressors such as experiencing deep poverty during childhood or experiencing ongoing physical abuse. There can be various degrees of stress in between these two as well. One system identifies five types of stressors labeled ‘acute time-limited stressors,’ ‘brief naturalistic stressors,’ ‘stressful event sequences,’ ‘chronic stressors,’ and ‘distant stressors,’ which are stressors that happened a long time ago that continue to affect you (Segerstrom & Miller, 2017). Acute time-limited stressors and brief naturalistic stressors, for example, taking a challenging exam, only last for a short time and may not have lasting negative effects. However, stressful events sequences (which are like compound stressors – for example, the stress of a car accident and then the resulting financial and health stressors), chronic stressors (such as the stress of being disabled from the car wreck), and distant stressors from your past, can affect your health and have a negative impact over time. Stress also impacts people differently during different times of their lives. It is a very subjective thing – what is stressful to me may not be stressful to you and vice versa. As you are catching on, stress is a very complex and personal concept.

It might be useful to remind ourselves what we are talking about in this chapter – things that are stressors in part because they are out of our control. These are the things that are in our circle of concern, because we care about them and they impact us, and yet there may not be much we can do to influence the outcomes. This may be something like what other people think of you or whether other people do what you want them to. It could also be whether other people are unkind to you or deceive you, or whether other people feel disappointed in you, or hate you, or love you. We generally do not have absolute control over other people’s thoughts, attitudes, motivations, feelings, and behaviors – positive or negative. We may be able to influence, but not control them. There are additional aspects of life that we care about and which impact us, but are not under our control. These include the weather, time passing, and global pandemics, to name a few. These things are certainly in our circle of concern, but not in our circle of control or influence. That is not to say that we have zero influence or that we can do absolutely nothing to move some aspects of the situations back into our circle of influence.

Being able to examine situations like those described above and determine what is under your control and what is not, what you value or stand for, what is important to you, and then develop a way to accept and deal with the situation is an extremely useful life skill and can certainly help contribute to living a good life! We might call this complex ability something like successful coping, resilience, or if demonstrated over time, grit. It is the ability to examine and stay with a situation, accept it for what it is, and explore ways to set realistic value-based coping or problem-solving goals, and then move forward with implementation in whatever form that takes. This can also be related to decades of research on locus of control, a concept similar to self-efficacy, but focused more on ownership of control of the situation. The concept is that you possess an internal or external locus of control both generally as a person, but also within given situations. Internal locus of control involves a belief that you can control your own life or the situation and external locus of control involves a belief that life or the situation is controlled by outside factors that you cannot influence, or the belief that chance or fate controls your life (Weiner, 1974). Dr. Julian Rotter, who conducted most of the pioneering work in the area of social-learning theory of personality, cautioned that internality and externality represent two ends of a continuum, not an either/or typology (Rotter, 1990). Although you may have an in-born proclivity for attributional style, with intention, you can begin to take ownership of what you can change and let go of what you cannot. When these things are done with intention and flexibility it can further increase adaptability and effectiveness. Things don't always work out the way you want, but you may be able to get closer to your goals than you thought you could, and you certainly can get through the situation without making it worse! As we used to sing to Morgan, 'All problems have solutions …. They just might not be the ones you had in mind!' Catchy little tune, indeed!

Stress and Resilience

One could argue that the world's most monumental efforts and events that have catalyzed revolutions and changed cultures were inspired and brought on by people who perceived and reacted to stress – stress from injustice, cruelty, poverty, and fear, to name a few! What, you might ask, is the secret to turning this stress into effective and productive coping? Research increasingly supports that it is human resilience! Resilience is the capacity of people to effectively cope with, adjust, or recover from stress or adversity. It is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. Resilience is not a trait that individuals either have or do not have. Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and accompanying feelings that can be nurtured, developed, and learned. That is right – resilience can be learned!

Our ancient ancestors were in danger most of their lives and the threat of death was always present. Today, most of us no longer live in a world where we're constantly on the lookout for the types of danger our ancestors were prepared for – it's highly unlikely, for the majority of us, that a tiger will maul us at any moment or that we will come across a pack of hungry wolves. But whenever we feel stressed, distressed, or mistreated the same signals fire in our brains and bodies to fight, flee, or freeze (McEwen, 2005) and some more recent research shows that some of us may actually be programmed to tend and befriend (Taylor et al., 2000). The tend-and-befriend theoretical model was originally developed by Dr. Shelley Taylor and her team at the University of California, Los Angeles, and refers to the female tendency under stress to protect offspring (tending) and seek out the social group for mutual defense (befriending).

Much of the way we think about stress and the human reaction to it is informed by the work of the late Canadian–Hungarian medical scientist Dr. Hans Selye (1907–1983). Dr. Selye is credited with introducing the concept of stress into popular, as well as medical, discussions. He proposed the idea of the general adaptation syndrome, which is a physiologic response that takes the form of a series of three stages in reaction to a stressor (Selye, 1946). The first stage is the alarm reaction, in which the adrenal medulla releases epinephrine and the adrenal cortex produces glucocorticoids, both of which help to restore homeostasis or balance – you use these resources to activate yourself – like to get ready to fight. Restoration of homeostasis leads to the second stage of resistance, in which defense and adaptation are sustained and optimal – this keeps you going a bit longer to get out of harm's way, work harder to connect, or continue the fight. If the stressor persists, according to Dr. Selye's model, the stage of exhaustion follows, and adaptive response ceases. This is when you are in trouble and more vulnerable to illness or even death!

What this means: Too little stress is bad and puts you in a bored or unproductive range. Just the right amount means you are engaged and challenged. But too much stress puts you back in the bad range, as your stress becomes so overwhelming that it can paralyze or harm you.

Impact of Stress: Friend or Foe?

We have long known that unrelenting stress is harmful. A significant aspect of our innate survival responses that we have to stress, is that they are not merely reserved for life-threatening events; our brains and bodies can actually experience the same type of stress in response to encounters that are not life threatening, like working with a boss you distrust or being chronically behind in bills (McEwen, 2005). What happens with chronic stress is that the natural response to a crisis that would potentially help you escape or fight an enemy continues instead of stopping when that acute encounter is over. Your alarm system in your hypothalamus gets turned on, and stays on. Through a combination of neural and hormonal signals, this alarm system prompts your adrenal glands to release a surge of hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. Adrenaline increases your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure, and boosts energy supplies. Cortisol, the primary stress hormone, increases glucose in your bloodstream, enhances your brain's use of glucose and increases the availability of substances that repair tissues. Cortisol also curbs functions that would be nonessential or detrimental in a fight-or-flight situation. It alters immune system responses and suppresses the digestive system, reproductive system, and growth processes. This complex natural alarm system also communicates with the brain to activate motivation, alertness, or fear. This activates you in healthy, life-saving ways! Short bursts of stress can put into motion behaviors that can actually save your life or the life of another. For example, we have all heard stories of the mother who suddenly demonstrates super-human strength and pulls a 400 pound fallen bookcase off her child. This natural response makes you more attentive and able to quickly respond to external threats. Interestingly, this same bodily reaction happens when you face other stressors, such as taking an important test or giving someone bad news. Stress can improve your performance because it motivates you to pay attention and focus. This is you on high alert!

Although research does appear to support the idea that some stress can be good, an excessive amount is not. Too much stress for too long can lead to significant emotional, interpersonal, and health problems. If stress lingers for too long, the long-term activation of the stress-response system and the overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones that follows can disrupt almost all of your body's processes in negative ways. One researcher who has extensively explored the long-term impact of chronic stress is neuroendocrinologist, Dr. Robert Sapolsky of Stanford University. Dr. Robert Sapolsky is a world-renowned expert on stress and how it impacts health and is the author of the critically acclaimed and popular book, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* (1994). The problem for people, according to Dr. Sapolksy, is that our bodies' stress response evolved to help us get out of short-term physical emergencies – if a bear is chasing you, you run. But such reactions compromise long-term physical health in favor of immediate self-preservation. He further points out that when confronted with purely psychological stressors, such as troubleshooting your iPhone camera, modern humans turn on the same stress response. This puts humans at increased risk for health problems and emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety symptoms in response to chronic stress (Sapolsky, 1994; Pechtel & Pizzagalli, 2011; Staal, 2013). This is you stressed out!

Remember, although you may not have control over the stressors in your life, you do have control over how you respond to the stressors. This includes how you behave, what you say, and how you think and feel about the stressors. Recently, psychology researchers such Dr. Elizabeth Kirby at the Ohio State University Psychology Department and Dr. Kelly McGonigal who lectures at Stanford University have promoted the idea that some stress is good and even necessary for growth and connection with others (Muroy et al., 2016; McGonigal, 2015). Their research demonstrates that experiencing moderate levels of stress can actually have positive impacts. For instance, mental alertness and memory can improve under moderate stress and stress can motivate behavior. In her book, *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress Is Good for You, and How to Get Good at It* (McGonigal, 2015), Dr. McGonigal promotes the idea of cognitive reappraisal of stress and describes how conceptualizing something as a challenge versus a stress can be helpful. This is a classic idea popularized decades ago by psychologists such as Dr. Albert Ellis, Dr. Aaron Beck, and Dr. Donald Meichenbaum. The idea is that how you appraise a situation determines whether it impacts you in a stressful manner with negative outcomes, or in a more positive fashion where adaptive learning and growth is experienced. This second situation is called eustress and is commonly defined as moderate or normal psychological stress that is interpreted as being potentially beneficial.

Different factors determine whether a particular demand will cause eustress or distress in a given person. How we think about a stressor (our appraisal and our self-talk), how we think about our own capabilities (our self-concept), and how we think about the specific characteristics of the stressor (how long it lasts, how it impacts us) will collectively determine whether we experience stress over handling the given situation. Classic research in this area was conducted by Dr. Lazarus and Dr. Folkman, mentor and student, respectively, at the University of California at Berkeley. Although Richard Lazarus passed away in 2002, Susan Folkman is currently an Emerita Professor of Medicine at the University of California at San Francisco. The influence of their 1984 transactional theory of stress and coping is remarkable and remains the cornerstone of psychological stress and coping research across multiple fields. They were the first to make the distinction between 'problem-focused coping' and 'emotion-focused coping' which could result in consequences for both physical and mental health (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). We present a list of these forms of coping at the end of the chapter and invite you to use these and share them. These are some of the materials that we shared with people during the early days of COVID in order to provide some helpful strategies for coping.

Stress and Cognitive Appraisal

Lazarus and Folkman described the importance of the cognitive appraisal process in determining whether stress is positive or negative. In other words, they pointed out that how you conceptualize or think about the stress you are facing is important. They proposed two aspects to cognitive appraisal: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal is when you think about if the stressor matters to you (is it in your circle of concern). Why stress about something if it is not important to you at all? Secondary appraisal is when you evaluate existing coping resources (e.g., how healthy you are, how much energy or money you have), your available options, and the possibilities you have for controlling the situation (what is in your circle of influence or control). Lazarus and Folkman propose that if we believe that we lack the coping resources necessary to deal with the situation, we will perceive it as negative stress. On the other hand, if we believe that we have the necessary coping resources, the stressor will not overwhelm us and may instead be perceived as eustress. For example, a single teenage girl living on the streets might experience finding out that she is pregnant extremely distressing, while a married woman in her early thirties with adequate financial and social support might see pregnancy as very positive and something to be grateful for. The situation of being pregnant is the same, the stress response is very different.

According to the highly influential and widely accepted cognitive theory of emotions, based on the seminal work of clinical researchers, Dr. Albert Ellis and Dr. Aaron Beck, thoughts and beliefs of people (driven by appraisal of the situation) strongly influence their subsequent mood state. For example, if you believe that you have the ability and resources to handle the stressors you are faced with, your mood will be generally positive; and if you believe that you do not have what it takes to meet the demands you are faced with, your mood will turn negative, possibly causing you to become anxious or depressed. Dr. Ellis developed these ideas in the mid to late 1950s while at Columbia University, leading to the development of his psychotherapy called Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT; Ellis & MacLaren, 2005). Dr. Beck was heavily influenced by REBT and developed a similar approach called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT, or sometimes Cognitive Therapy) in the late 1960s – early-to-mid 1970s (Beck, 1975) at the University of Pennsylvania (David et al., 2018). These psychotherapeutic approaches are both built upon the idea that our interpretations, appraisals, and beliefs have a significant impact on our emotions and behaviors. Additionally, our emotions impact behavior and appraisal and behavior can impact emotions and how we appraise or think of the situation. This is what Dr. Beck called the Cognitive Triangle (Byrne & Fenn, 2013).

Although it is difficult to directly change emotions (we will discuss this more in chapter 9), humans are able to reevaluate and change thoughts or appraisals of a situation. This means that if you can find a way to see your situation in a more positive light, you can alter your mood from very negative to less negative or even neutral or positive. This insight has been incorporated into a psychotherapeutic technique called Cognitive Reframing which is a strategy incorporated into many currently used and empirically supported psychotherapies to help address stress.

Both Ellis and Beck present the basic idea behind what is termed the 'ABC model.' The model goes like this: In our lives we run into activating events or people labeled 'A.' These are the situations or interactions with people in our daily lives which may trigger our 'maps' or create hassles or major crises. Our appraisals, interpretations, beliefs, thoughts about these events are labeled 'B.' We come into the world with no preconceived beliefs or opinions. From the moment we start interacting with the environment, we start to learn the opinions of others (remember those 'maps' or 'rules' we talked about in Chapter 1) and also start forming opinions or appraisals of our own. All of these opinions eventually become internalized into a consistent (but often biased) world view which we use as a measuring stick against which to interpret and appraise ourselves, other people, and the world around us. The degree of bias and rigidity in our belief system is important, because, as a general rule, the more biased and rigid our beliefs are, the more often we will find ourselves becoming stressed out. Beliefs which are accurate, flexible, and optimistic in nature help to reduce stress, while beliefs which are rigid, negative, inflexible, and pessimistic tend to exacerbate stress. Our emotions in response are labeled 'C.' Consequences refer to the feelings that occur as a result of our beliefs and self-talk in response to the activating event. The consequences we experience can include emotions such as stress, anxiety, depression, anger, irritability, aggression, frustration, etc. What Ellis and Beck and others propose is that the actual external event or person (A) does not cause our emotions (C) but instead our appraisal/thoughts/beliefs (B) about the events or person impact how we feel and behave in situations (Sarracino et al., 2017). According to the late Dr. Ellis, the relationship between thoughts and emotion can be represented by the simple equation 'A+B=C.'

Morgan and I saw real-life examples of the difference that appraisal (the 'B' in the formula) can make in how you feel and live your life during the COVID-19 quarantine. The entire world was shut-down and on quarantine in the spring of 2020. It was an unprecedented and unnerving situation to say the least. Morgan and I were working from home exclusively and my husband, her father, David still had to go to the hospital to treat cancer patients. Our entire family was still working – I was seeing patients remotely and helping support them during this incredibly stressful time. I had the honor to see people both struggle and fail and struggle and succeed in coping with this very stressful situation that was completely out of everyone's control. The stressful situation was the same for most of us: (A) There is a potentially deadly virus spreading around the globe and the government quarantined people to slow down the spread. How people interpreted or appraised (B) this state of affairs differed and changed over time, and thus their outcomes and consequences (C) varied from person to person and over time.

The real-life examples below help demonstrate the power of our appraisal upon our mood and our ability to be resilient.

Darin was a 47-year-old stay-at-home dad with three young sons who had anxiety and depression and was in recovery from treatments for throat cancer. He had been anxious most of his life and had a history of a physically and emotionally abusive father and an absent mother. He was a former heavy smoker who had quit just prior to his surgery and was learning new strategies to cope with anxiety as well as his cravings. His initial thoughts (B) about the COVID crisis were very anxious. In session with me, he endorsed thoughts like 'I survived cancer and now will be killed by COVID!' and 'There is nothing I can do to protect myself or my family.' These interpretations naturally lead to increased feelings (C) of anxiety, frustration, and fear. He was more irritable and getting into more arguments with his wife.

Amie, a 33-year-old single mother of two who suffered from depression since her teens had been working in therapy with me for seven months prior to the COVID crisis. She also came from an abusive childhood home and had continued in an abusive romantic relationship until the birth of her second child, when her partner died and she sought treatment. We had been working on exploring her 'maps' and helping her understand what she had learned about herself and others growing up, as well as develop new ways of appraising situations with a focus on her value-centered goals. She had been engaging in Cognitive Behavioral Analysis System of Psychotherapy (CBASP) with me and becoming more aware of the value of setting realistic and attainable goals, and gearing her thoughts toward facilitating achievement of these goals. She was increasingly able to notice maladaptive thinking and reframe it to help work toward her goal. She was also beginning to feel safer and understanding better her impact on others and others' impact on her. When we discussed the COVID crisis (A) her thoughts (B) were: 'This COVID seems like serious stuff and I am glad to have guidelines on how to protect myself and my kids!' and 'I am not in this alone – I have support!' Subsequently, her emotions (C) were hopeful and calm. She still felt the gravity of the situation and took it seriously, but was not constantly overwhelmed with fear or despair.

In these examples, the same stressor impacts two people differently based upon their interpretations and appraisal of the situation. The cognitive theory of emotion suggests that these appraisals or thoughts that we have are influential in determining whether we will experience eustress or distress.

Stress and Perceived Control

A large amount of research has demonstrated quite convincingly that possessing high levels of self-efficacy acts to decrease people's potential for experiencing negative stress feelings by increasing their sense of being in control of the situations they encounter (Ross & Sastry, 1999). The perception of being in control (rather than the reality of being in or out of control) is an important buffer of negative stress. When people feel that they are not in control, they start feeling stressed, even if they actually are in control and simply don't know it. Another reason that people feel stressed is when they feel out of control because they do not possess the appropriate coping skills, resources, etc. to adequately cope with the situation.

When a given demand (e.g., passing an exam, winning a race) is perceived as something you can handle because you expect you will do well based on preparation or past experience (e.g., because you have studied for the exam or trained for the race), you are likely to perceive the demand as a challenge and as an exhilarating experience. After the event is over, you may even have a resulting boost in self-esteem because you worked hard to meet the demand and succeeded. If, however, the demand seems beyond your abilities, you will likely experience distress. Across time, feeling unable to respond effectively to stressful situations can further decrease your sense of self-efficacy, making you even more prone to experience distress in the future.

Hopefully, you can now see how stressors like being treated unfairly, facing danger or threats, or being quarantined, over time, lead to feeling stressed and can even make you feel physically sick. You also hopefully can see why it is important to recognize when certain scenarios require these sorts of stress signals to turn on and when it is necessary to take a step back and respond calmly to distresses or inconveniences. It's also important to cultivate a healthy relationship with stress and its causes, because whether we like it or not, we're going to experience quite a lot of it in life. Stress doesn't ever truly go away, so we may as well learn to address or cope with it! Overall, the research to date appears to support that the best way to address feelings of unfairness, fear, anger, frustration, and other causes of stress is through increasing resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2003).

What Is Resilience?

As you may recall from Chapter 2, a combination of factors contributes to resilience in humans. Many studies show that a primary factor in cultivating resilience is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Relationships that create love and trust, provide role models, and offer encouragement and reassurance help foster a secure attachment between parent and child according to attachment theory (Holmes, 2017). Looking at the research data from Interpersonal Psychotherapy, people with secure attachment demonstrate interpersonal behavior styles that are consistent with a primarily friendly assertive stance on the interpersonal circle (Mallinckrodt, 2000). This is no coincidence. Social interpersonal behavior in the friendly assertive realm certainly appears to bolster a person's positive interactions and ultimately their resilience. Obviously, having a supportive family of origin is not something we all necessarily have in our backgrounds. If you are so lucky to have had this kind of supportive history, you have a wonderful leg-up on building resilience! If you do not have such a family history, do not fear! Remember, we said that one of the best things about resilience is that you can learn strategies to increase it (Reivich & Shatté, 2003).

It is also important to remember that having resilience does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties. If you grow your resilience, it does not mean that you escape pain or disappointment. As a resilient person, you still experience grief, hurt, and frustration, but your mental outlook helps to allow you to be with the challenging emotions, work through the feelings, and recover.

Resilience gives people the strength to get through a tough situation, tackle a big problem head-on, overcome adversity, endure and move on with their lives. In the wake of traumas such as those that have happened in our lifetime, such as the 9/11 attacks and the more recent COVID-19 crisis, many individuals demonstrated resilient behaviors. Many of us have been able to remain strong in the face of almost unbearable stress or loss and carry on. Some of us have even been resilient enough to offer emotional support to others! Imagine the improvement in the world, if we were all a bit more resilient!

Strategies for Building Resilience

Developing resilience is a personal journey. Some of us have a bit more resilience from the get-go. Our developmental and learning histories vary from person to person. We all have different maps from growing up and may therefore react differently to the same to traumatic and stressful life events as in the examples provided earlier. Thus, an approach to building resilience that works for one person might not work for another. People may use different strategies at different points in their life, and yet all can still grow their resilience. Some variation in strategies used may reflect cultural differences. A person's culture might have an impact on how he or she communicates feelings and deals with adversity. For example, whether and how a person connects with significant others, including extended family members and community resources. The positive thing is that with growing cultural diversity, the public has greater access to a number of different approaches to building resilience.

We invite you to examine your own level of resiliency. Do you already have a leg up by coming from a loving and supportive background where you learned healthy lessons about overcoming adversity or engaging in appropriate self-care? Did your family sing a song about how all problems have solutions? Do you already use healthy strategies that help you build resilience and practice proactivity? Think of the strengths and competencies you already have, and focus on maintaining what you are already doing that is working and try doing it even more skillfully. You can also focus on adding new skills and expanding your repertoire! You can assess your level of resilience by measuring it with a psychological test. There are multiple tools to help evaluate your level of resilience, if that is a strategy you would like to use. While there is not currently a 'gold standard' for assessing resiliency, a review of options by authors Windle, Bennett, & Noyes (2011) can provide some recommendations. These authors reported that the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003), the Resilience Scale for Adults (Hjemdal et al., 2011), and the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) received the best psychometric ratings in their evaluation. Most of the formal tests of resiliency are developed with a particular theory in mind or a goal for the assessment. Thus, it is useful to think about what you would want to learn from an assessment before you chose one.

Our hope is that you will focus on increasing your own resilience regardless of your current abilities and coping. Remember, to gain resiliency, you must necessarily be confronted with stress. Keeping this in mind helps you reframe your challenges and difficulties as opportunities to build your resilience! By learning healthy ways to move through adversity, you can cope better with negative situations, confront emotional pain, and recover from setbacks and difficulties more quickly. Below, we present some practices that have been demonstrated to help build resilience and cope with adversity, whether it stems from a person or the environment.

Approach and Accept

Part of becoming resilient is recognizing what you can and cannot control – what is realistic and what is not. When adversity arises or bad things happen, sometimes your original goals may no longer be attainable. Identifying and accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter. For instance, for some people when something bad happens or a stressor is in their life, they may deny it or pretend like it did not happen, and although this may feel better short-term, in the long run this is not helpful and can often make things worse. Some other people may relive the negative event over and over, rehashing the pain, even though they cannot change the situation. This process is called rumination; it's like a cognitive spinning of the wheels, and it doesn't move us forward toward healing and growth. It's like focusing only on the 'B' from the ABC model discussed above. We get stuck in our negative thoughts and cannot move beyond them. A more productive method for growing resilience is to try to accept what cannot be changed and move forward.

Acceptance is defined by Dr. Steven Hayes as 'making contact with the automatic or direct stimulus functions of events, without acting to reduce or manipulate those functions, and without acting solely on the basis of their derived or verbal functions' (Hayes, 1994, pp. 30–31). Acceptance involves noticing your own thoughts and emotions, letting go of efforts to avoid or change them, and then responding to the reality of the situation, instead of your thoughts or feelings about the situation. Facing the issue or person that is causing you problems is also one of the first steps in building resilience. The second step is to evaluate in an intentional manner what within the situation is under your control and what is not. This can be very difficult to do without some form of structured exercise to help reinterpret the event or help gain perspective of the situation. This can be thought of as going to the neutral place in the interpersonal circle or examining and updating your appraisal of the situation. To do this, you must observe what is happening within yourself and how it is connected to your environment, while simultaneously not becoming overwhelmed with the associated emotions. This is essentially taking a look from a more objective perspective. This perspective can help with the final step of acceptance which involves responding to the reality of the situation and not only to your interpretation or feelings about the situation. You can't change the fact that highly stressful events or interactions happen or that they cause distress, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you approach and accept difficult situations or people. In the words of the Austrian neuropsychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, in his famous 1946 book *Man's Search for Meaning* 'Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.'

Support and Be Supported

Sometimes our tendency is to withdraw or isolate during adversity, and this is not always the most helpful course of action. Yes, taking a timeout during a stressful interpersonal interaction that is in the hostile domain of the interpersonal circle can be a wise choice when there seems to be no positive movement within the interaction. Similarly, taking a break from a hectic or stressful environment, when done intentionally in order to help renew or bring calmness, can be a positive step.

Additionally, we know that being in a supportive interpersonal environment and connecting with trusted others can foster resilience. Like resilience, social support is a complex construct with many definitions. Having the 'tend-and-befriend' response to stress can be seen as leading to resilience. Naomi Eisenberger, Ph.D., a social psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles, defines social support as 'having or perceiving to have close others who can provide help or care, particularly during times of stress' (Eisenberger, 2013). There are multiple facets of social support: structural social support (number and frequency of supports); functional social support (helpful or beneficial supports); emotional social support (fosters positive emotion); instrumental/material social support (solve practical problems); and informational/cognitive social support (advice or guidance). These facets of social support can be facilitated and maintained by different systems, including family, community, and other systems. The benefits of taking a 'tend-and-befriend' approach to stress can help you connect with others. In any situation where you feel powerless, doing something to support others can help you sustain your motivation and optimism. The tend-and-befriend theory doesn't say that stress always leads to caring – stress can indeed make us angry and defensive. The theory simply says that stress can, and often does, make people more caring. And when we care for others, it changes our biochemistry, activating systems of the brain that produce feelings of hope and courage (Taylor, 2006).

While social support is a key correlate of psychological resilience, its effectiveness may vary over time due to changes in what the person needs. During adversity it is important to intentionally reach out to your support system and to be intentional about your goals in order to select helpers who can address your specific needs. Along with one-on-one relationships, some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based communities, or other service or social organizations can promote resilience. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper. Social support appears to work in multiple ways to increase resilience, including increasing positive self-esteem, providing a feeling of being understood, and motivating healthy behaviors and cognitive reappraisal in more adaptive ways (Southwick et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, a lack of social support can have a negative impact on our resilience. According to research by Dr. Eisenberger (2013) and others (Southwick et al., 2016), social rejection and loneliness can activate the same neurobiological systems as a physical threat such as a truck about to hit you!

I work with patients who have been diagnosed with cancer and who have to depend on others for functional, emotional, and instrumental support in order to get through their treatments. Many of these patients have reported to me that they feel bad having people help them because they don't want to be a burden to others. What I remind them of, is that allowing someone to help you in very tangible ways, is actually a gift to the other person. Think about it, most of us, when we have a loved one going through a rough time, want to help, but don't know how. We feel bad that we cannot make their cancer better, but there are things we can do to help in practical ways and it can feel so wonderful to help someone in need – it is indeed a gift!

Pursue Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness brings us into the present moment in a nonjudgmental way, and it offers techniques for dealing with negative emotions when they arise. That way, instead of getting carried away into fear, anger, or despair, we can work through them more deliberately. There are many forms of mindfulness, including meditation of various kinds and more structured programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). This mindfulness approach was developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn who has a Ph.D. in molecular biology, and is currently Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. In 1979, he founded the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he adapted the Buddhist teachings on mindfulness that he had studied since college and developed an eight-week program that offers secular, intensive mindfulness training to assist people coping with the stress of pain. This is what came to be known as MBSR. We will discuss this effective approach for coping with pain in chapter 10, but for now we will just mention that various studies have found that MBSR has wide-ranging health and psychological benefits for people in general, as well as those struggling with chronic pain (Praissman, 2008).

Show Compassion

We have discussed in earlier chapters, the difference between compassion and empathy. As you may recall, compassion involves emotional, cognitive, and motivational responses to suffering, where the person who witnesses suffering feels a sense of caring for and wanting to help others experiencing suffering (Engen & Singer, 2015). Compassion can be demonstrated for others or for yourself. Self-compassion involves offering compassion to yourself, which includes confronting your own suffering with an attitude of warmth and kindness, without judgment. Both self-compassion and compassion for others can be taught through mental training such as compassion meditation (Salzberg, 1997). Compassion meditation involves mental exercises that cultivate concern for and motivation to relieve suffering of the self and others (Salzberg, 1997; Hofmann et al., 2011), and has been shown to enhance positive emotional responses (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Klimecki et al., 2014) and prosocial behavioral responses to suffering (Ashar et al., 2017).

Compassion, both for self and others, also appears to be one of the necessary ingredients for growing resilience in humans. According to researchers such as Dr. Helen Weng, who is an assistant professor of Psychiatry at the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, compassion meditation appears to have its positive impact on resilience by slowing things down so people can practice being calmer, notice the feelings that arise and learn to be less reactive (Weng et al., 2018). Self-compassion is essentially compassion turned inward. It involves tapping into our ability to notice and care for other people's suffering and then direct this compassion toward our own personal suffering. Compassion researcher, Dr. Kristen Neff (2011) suggests that there are three components to self-compassion: (1) viewing our emotional experiences from a non-judgmental perspective, (2) treating ourselves with kindness in times of distress, and (3) seeing our suffering as part of the human condition. Research shows that brief practices designed to increase self-compassion can improve our mood, decrease our anxiety, and help us to learn and bounce back from mistakes – this is the definition of resilience (Germer & Neff, 2013).

There are many ways to practice compassion and self-compassion to help promote resilience, and we provide one brief practice recommended by Dr. Neff, who is well known for her research in this area. She recommends the 'self-compassion break' as an exercise to increase compassion and resilience. It has three steps, which correspond to the three aspects of self-compassion:

- Be mindful: Notice what is going on with you without judging – similar to being in the neutral part of the interpersonal circle
- Remember that you're not alone: Other people experience similar things
- Be kind to yourself: Literally pay attention to what you tell yourself and tell yourself kind things

I often work with patients who find it very hard to do the last step of this exercise. Interestingly, they can say kind and supportive things to other people, but not to themselves. So, what I do in that situation is ask them to think about what they would say to a dear friend or loved one and use the same wording for themselves! It is amazing how we will often say horrible things to ourselves that we would never say to someone we like or even to a stranger! I encourage people to think about what they are going to say to themselves, and if they wouldn't say it to a friend, then they certainly should not say it to themselves. Often, this comparison can lead to valuable reflections such as 'Why am I so harsh on myself, and what would happen if I weren't?'

Find Purpose or Meaning

One thing that resilient people tend to do is find meaning or purpose in hardship. This can take many forms. It can be reframing the situation to see the opportunity and not just the challenge. It can be using meaning making to reappraise the situation or interpersonal interaction event after the fact. Finding purpose or meaning necessitates that you approach and accept the situation and see the reality for what it is. Only then, can you find or create meaning in the challenge. This ability to make meaning is a higher-order human capacity for transforming pain or loss into sources of insight and deepened understanding of self and others. Resilience can also include transforming adversity into personal growth. Growth in the aftermath of trauma, crisis, or suffering has been elaborated in the research literature (Tedeschi et al., 1998). The framing of such growth is different from the realization of personal capacities and talents emphasized in a eudemonic approach to resilience. The eudemonic approach to human well-being, rooted in development, existential, and humanistic approaches, emphasizes the possibility of growth in the aftermath of trauma, crisis, or suffering. The essential roles of strong social ties and the capacity to derive meaning and realize personal growth in grappling with adversity are highlighted in this way of conceptualizing resilience. Eudemonic is a Greek word meaning prosperity or happiness and has been translated to mean 'living well' and was an approach to life written about by Plato and Aristotle (Robinson, 1999). Models of eudaimonia in modern psychology emerged from early work on self-actualization by researchers such as Erik Erikson, Gordon Allport, and Abraham Maslow (Ryff, 1989). Additional modern theories of well-being, flourishing, and positive psychology by psychologists such as Ryff, Keyes, and Frederickson (Keyes, 2002) and Seligman (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000), have also grown out of the eudaimonia theoretical approach to human life and growth through adversity.

Post-Traumatic Growth

The concept of resilience in the face of adversity has been growing in popularity in recent years. Research on post-traumatic growth (PTG) has increased and the idea that good things can come from stress has proliferated. PTG is another theory that explains this kind of transformation following trauma. The theory was promoted by psychologists Richard Tedeschi, Ph.D., and Lawrence Calhoun, Ph.D., in the mid-1990s, and promotes the idea that people who endure psychological struggle or stress following adversity can often see positive growth afterward. Researchers have found that different components such as coping style, gratitude, and cognitive interpretation of control all play a mediating role between resiliency and PTG (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004). PTG can be confused with resilience, but the two are generally thought of as related but different constructs. According to psychology researchers, Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, PTG refers to what can happen when someone who has difficulty bouncing back experiences a traumatic event that challenges his or her core beliefs, endures psychological struggle, and then ultimately finds a sense of personal growth. They propose that someone who is already resilient when trauma occurs won't experience PTG because a resilient person isn't 'rocked to the core by an event and doesn't have to seek a new belief system' (Collier, 2016, p. 48). Less resilient people, on the other hand, may go through distress and confusion as they try to understand why this terrible thing happened to them and what it means for their world view.

Getting Gritty

Relatedly, the concept of 'grit' has recently been popularized by Dr. Angela Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania. She describes grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals and has produced research demonstrating that the characteristic of grit is significantly associated with improved performance and achievement of goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). Resilience is the optimism to continue when times are tough and you've experienced some failures. Grit is the drive that keeps you on a difficult task over a sustained period of time. The two concepts are related but not identical. It would seem that to overcome chronic adversity having both resilience and grit would be beneficial! Duckworth formulated the idea of grit as the combination of passion and perseverance. Passion means long-term adherence to a goal and consistency of interest, and perseverance means overcoming setbacks, hard work, and finishing things, rather than giving up. There is also a trait called conscientiousness, one of the Big Five personality traits, that is similar to what Dr. Duckworth calls grit. Conscientiousness includes self-discipline and self-control. According to Duckworth, the concept of grit expands on conscientiousness by including the retention of the same high-order goals over long stretches of time (Duckworth et al., 2007).

What You Can Do to Help Yourself Now

Exercise for Coping with the Negative

Assume Positive Intent

This exercise can be used to deal with challenging people or interactions. The goal is to proactively avoid negative biases and improve communication.

- Technique: When someone does something you do not understand, or seems negative, out of line, unreasonable, take the stance of assuming they had a good reason, a good intention. Then ask the question 'I wonder why …?' Assuming positive intent gives you a more flexible starting point in interpreting someone else's behavior. Implicit bias research also shows that we react out of bias unconsciously, creating a cascade of behavior that we may not want. This practice can interrupt that cascade, even when we are not initially aware of the bias
- Suggestions for use: Employ this DAILY and when people say or do things that you don't understand, or seem negative
- Potential barriers and how to overcome: This technique is hard to do because it takes intention and practice. It is often much easier to react negatively than to ask the question 'I wonder why…' To help facilitate doing this it can be helpful to let others know you are trying to do this. They can then remind you and help you ask the curious question rather than assuming

What You Can Do for Another

There is substantial evidence that one of the most effective ways to increase resilience in a child is to focus on the well-being and child-rearing skills of his/her parents (Anakcer, O'Donnell & Meaney, 2014). This is simultaneously positive news and challenging news, since we know that not all parents are in a state of well-being when they are raising their children. Working on your own coping skills and building your own resilience are some of, the most important things you can do for the children in your life.

A number of studies and programs have demonstrated that teaching at-risk parents to understand their own needs as well as the emotional and mental needs of their infant/child may enhance attachment security and reduce a variety of later maladaptive outcomes, including child maltreatment and criminal behavior, thus improving resilience in the children of these parents (Osofsky & Thompson, 2000).

Adults can also encourage resilience in children by using positive coping strategies, especially those that have been effective in past difficult situations for either the child or parent. Instead of allowing children to ruminate on the past trauma, for example, adults can encourage children not only to remember and reflect on the event, but also to perform positive actions in the present, such as sending positive thoughts to those in need, volunteering at an animal shelter, sending cards to active-duty personnel, or helping others in need.

Exercise to Strengthen Resilience

Mountain Pose with Meditation on Resilience and Compassion

Yoga can be a wonderful tool to better understand and communicate yourself, particularly when dealing with difficult people. While we aren't able to control the actions or feelings of others, we have total control over our approaches and reactions to difficult interpersonal situations.

One exercise to tap into this understanding is to stand up straight, with a proud chest and steady legs, feet planted firmly on the ground. Hands can remain by the side of the body but are alert, with palms facing forward. As you take three breaths, bring your awareness to the sensation of your feet connecting to the ground and your feet supporting your strong legs, engaged middle body, aligned spine, relaxed shoulders and neck. Allow yourself to release any tension held in the body – relax the jaw, soften the brow, and let your toes fall heavy to the ground. As you stand tall, strong, and steady in this pose, you can continue breathing mindfully, and if possible, begin to notice warmth in your heart space or chest. Imagine spreading that same sensation of warm, compassionate energy to the person(s) with whom you interact. By calming your own body, focusing on your breath, and sending compassionate energy to those you interact with, you are able to practice taking care of yourself in the midst of difficulty. If your compassionate energy is received, you may even be able to totally redirect the conversation on a positive, more collegial path!

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9 I Don't Want to Feel This Way!

Trina's Story

Trina was a petite attractive woman in her late 20s, with long black hair and huge dark eyes, who came to see me because she said her emotions were 'out of control.' She arrived in my office tearful with downcast eyes, and a wad of tissues already in her hand. She reported that recently she and her boyfriend of 2 years broke up and then her beloved pet dog died. She endorsed feeling sad about the losses and stated that she had been struggling due to feeling so despondent and hopeless. She endorsed problems falling asleep, crying more easily, and a profound lack of motivation. She found almost nothing interesting. I expressed my condolences and stated that I understood how painful those two losses could be, and could understand why she might be feeling sad. Trina finally raised her head, looked at me with wide eyes, and stated that she did not want to feel sad! She hated how she felt and had been angry at herself for feeling so upset. She wanted me to tell her how to stop feeling bad!

I often have people tell me that their emotions are out of their control, they want them to stop, and that they need my help to do this. This is part of my job – I help people deal with their difficult emotions, but what they often want is to NOT deal with their emotions. They want their emotions to go away. They want their negative emotions to not exist. Trina was suffering from recent significant losses and feelings of depression, not things that most people would choose to experience. Trina was experiencing additional difficulty because she did not want to feel the way she felt and she was actively struggling against it, which was only making her feel worse.

Why Do We Even Have Emotions?

Many of us have an automatic, almost 'mindless' relationship with our emotions. We feel something and we believe it. The unexamined emotion then impacts what we think, how we interact, what we do. Most of us do not grow up in a society where we are familiarized with or educated about our emotions. This is ironic given how central emotions are to human life.

Our relationship to emotions is at least partially programmed by our early learning environment. We may learn that expressing emotions is safe and cathartic, or we may learn that emotions are dangerous and will be punished, or we may learn that showing emotions is weak and will be exploited or punished. Whether we are explicitly aware of it or not we react to our emotions based in part on these assumptions and interpretations learned early in life. This includes not only our family and the people who raised us but also the larger culture and society in which we live. In short, despite the universality of basic emotions, and the fact that all humans have similar facial muscles and neural architecture responsible for emotional expression, there are cultural differences in how people read emotion. For example, people are usually more accurate when judging facial expressions from their own culture than those from others (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2003). Furthermore, cross-cultural differences in emotional arousal level have consistently been found in the research literature. Typically, people from western societies value, promote, and experience high-arousal emotions more than low-arousal emotions, whereas the vice versa is true for people from the eastern parts of the world. These cultural differences are explained by social scientists as the distinct characteristics of individualist and collectivist cultures (Lim, 2016). So even though we all experience emotions, we do not all experience emotions the same!

Emotions inform us of who we are, what our relationships with others are like, and how to behave in social interactions. Specifically, emotions give meaning to events, help coordinate interpersonal relationships, and also serve social and cultural functions that help keep human societies together (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).

Although different cultures may have different words for emotions, all human cultures have emotions. On a personal level, we might think of our own experiences of how emotions have helped us grow closer to someone we love. We feel an attraction toward someone and that emotion makes us want to be around that person even more. Or, if we feel a repulsion to someone, we make efforts to avoid being around that person. We also know from experience and the research literature that attempts to control and avoid emotions paradoxically maintains, even intensifies, emotional distress. The effort to suppress painful emotional experiences can take multiple forms, but the outcome is always the same: increased suffering.

Social scientists, such as Dr. Paul Ekman (1999), have been exploring emotions for centuries and have determined a list of innate emotions: amusement, anger, contempt, contentment, disgust, embarrassment, excitement, fear, guilt, happiness, pride, relief, sadness, satisfaction, sensory pleasure, shame, surprise. These are presumed to be present at birth and arise naturally in response to the environment. They are shaped of course, by learning history and many emotion researchers talk about 'secondary emotions' which are learned emotions. These are learned responses that happen after or in addition to the initial emotional response. An example might be a child who expresses anger at having to wait his turn in line and is then scolded for his angry response and told that he should be ashamed of himself for his anger. He may then feel shame. Shame is the secondary emotion and can be learned in response to feeling anger. Thus, in the future when the boy feels anger, he may also experience a secondary emotion of shame. You can see how this can lead to complications in life! We all have secondary emotions whether we are aware of it or not, so it may be helpful to explore the layers of your emotions next time a strong emotional response emerges.

Emotions play an important role in people's lives and have been the topic of study in psychology for well over a century (Cannon, 1927; Darwin, 1872; James, 1983). In psychology, emotion is often defined as a complex state of feeling that results in physical and psychological changes that influence thought and behavior. Emotionality is associated with a range of psychological phenomena, including temperament, personality, mood, and motivation. But why do we have emotions? Emotions play a crucial role in our lives because they serve important functions. Otherwise, emotions would probably have been drummed out of the genetic material of humans!

The famous naturalist, Charles Darwin, proposed that emotions evolved because they were adaptive and allowed humans to survive and reproduce (Darwin, 1872). Feelings of love and affection lead people to seek mates and reproduce. Feelings of fear compel people to either fight or flee the source of danger. According to the evolutionary theory of emotion, our emotions exist because they serve an adaptive role. Emotions motivate people to respond efficiently to the environment, which helps improve the chances of survival.

There are, of course, other theories of emotions, including physiological ones that emphasize the role of your body's reactions. The two most famous of these theories are the James-Lange and Cannon-Bard theories of emotions. The James-Lange theory is one of the best-known examples of a physiological theory of emotion. Independently proposed by psychologist Dr. William James and physiologist Dr. Carl Lange, the James-Lange theory of emotion suggests that emotions occur as a result of physiological reactions to events (James, 1884). Another well-known physiological theory is the Cannon-Bard theory of emotion. Dr. Walter Cannon first proposed his theory in the 1920s and his work was later expanded on by physiologist Dr. Philip Bard during the 1930s. According to the Cannon-Bard theory of emotion, we feel emotions and experience physiological reactions simultaneously (Cannon, 1927). Dr. Cannon disagreed with the James-Lange theory of emotion on several different grounds, including the fact that people can experience physiological reactions linked to emotions without actually feeling those emotions. Dr. Cannon also suggested that emotional responses occur much too quickly for them to be simply products of physical states (Cannon, 1927). Overall, the Cannon-Bard theory proposes that the physical and psychological experience of emotion happen at the same time and that one does not cause the other (Friedman, 2010).

There is also a lovely combination of these two theories called the 'Two-Factor Theory' proposed by Drs. Schacter and Singer in the early 1960s. It is an example of a cognitive theory of emotion, and proposes that physiological arousal occurs first, and then the person feeling the arousal must identify the reason and then experience it and label it as an emotion. In other words, a stimulus leads to a physiological response that is then cognitively interpreted and labeled resulting in a perceived emotion (Schacter & Singer, 1964).

Schachter and Singer's theory draws on both the James-Lange theory and the Cannon-Bard theory of emotion. Like the James-Lange theory, the Schachter-Singer theory proposes that people do infer emotions based on physiological responses. The critical factor is the situation and the cognitive interpretation that people use to label the emotion. Like the Cannon-Bard theory, the Schachter-Singer theory also suggests that similar physiological responses can produce varying emotions. For example, if you experience a racing heart and sweating palms during an important math exam, you will probably identify the emotion as anxiety. If you experience the same physical responses on a date with your significant other, you might interpret those responses as love, affection, or arousal (Schacter & Singer, 1964).

There are also cognitive appraisal theories of emotion, which hypothesize that a person must think first before experiencing emotion. The psychologist who pioneered this idea is Dr. Richard Lazarus. He built on the original work of Dr. Magda Arnold (1903–2002), an American psychologist who coined the term *appraisal* to refer to the cognitive processes preceding the elicitation of emotion. She developed her 'cognitive theory' in the 1960s, which specified that the first step in experiencing an emotion is an appraisal of the situation. According to these theories, the sequence of events first involves a stimulus, followed by thought which then leads to the simultaneous experience of a physiological response and the emotion. For example, if you encounter a hostile person screaming at you, you might immediately begin to think that you are in danger. This then leads to the emotional experience of fear and the physical reactions associated with the fight-or-flight response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

There is also a fairly new theory of emotion that proposed that facial expressions are capable of influencing our emotions! Is that cool or what? Supporters of this theory suggest that emotions are directly tied to changes in facial muscles. According to the facial feedback hypothesis, facial expressions are not only the results of our emotions but are also capable of influencing our emotions. In other words, the act of smiling can itself actually make you feel happier (Davis, Senghas, & Ochsner, 2009). Also, research found that people who are forced to smile pleasantly at a social function have a better time at the event than they would if they had frowned or had a neutral facial expression (Davis et al., 2009). Researchers have also discovered that depressed people reported reduced depressive symptoms after paralysis of their frowning muscles with Botox injections (Havas et al., 2010). Findings from this and other studies support the idea that facial feedback does indeed modulate the neural processing of emotional content. Of course, emotion is displayed not only through facial expression but also through tone of voice, body posture, and behavior. Research also suggests that we are quite sensitive to the emotional information communicated through body language, even if we're not consciously aware of it (Tamietto et al., 2009).

Why are we talking about all these theories of emotion? Because the theories can help educate us about why we have emotions, how they work, the purposes they serve, and what impacts them. With this information we can begin to develop strategies to help people more effectively be with their emotions. For instance, if I think about my emotions as adaptive, helping bring me close to those I love and avoid those who signal danger, this can help me be with my emotions and perhaps conceptualize them as helpful. Understanding that my emotions are also linked to how I think about a situation and to my physical reactions can be very enlightening. This means that although emotions are universal and inevitable, I can control some aspects, such as my thoughts and my breathing and whether my body is tense. This allows me then to influence the severity, intensity, or duration of the emotion. I can perhaps feel irritated instead of furious by slowing down, breathing deeply, and intentionally reappraising the situation. For example, when someone cuts me off in traffic, my heart pounds as I slam on the brakes, and my face flushes, and I shout an expletive, and think about what an idiot the person is, and feel angry and indignant. I can also take a deep breath, say a prayer of thanks for not wrecking my car, and curiously wonder what made the driver in such a hurry – maybe he is heading to the hospital – and I can regulate my emotion and feel less upset. I will probably still have some physiological reaction to nearly wrecking my car, but I do not need to turn that arousal into full blown anger, and I certainly do not need to carry that anger with me all day! Another simple thing I can learn to do to regulate emotions is that I can control my facial expressions and potentially impact my mood. I can smile and maybe not feel so bad! There is no way of escaping emotions totally, but there are effective ways to moderate or regulate them.

Darcy's Story

You can think of your emotions as a source of information. Your emotions tell you something about what's going on with you and around you and when combined with other sources of information, such as rational thoughts, experience, and your values and goals can inform how you proceed effectively. Your emotions are a source of information but not necessarily reflective of the whole truth! This is important to remember! I have a wonderful story of a friend, Darcy, who has no children despite several painful years of trying to conceive with her husband. At a party years prior to COVID (when we could gather at people's homes in large numbers!), we connected with some other newer female friends and spent the night talking and laughing about families, husbands, partners, work, and all number of things. At some point in the evening, after a discussion about children, one of the newer friends, Melissa, asked Darcy when she was going to have a baby. I could feel the emotional shift in Darcy immediately from relaxed and open to tense and closed. I felt awkward, but was not sure if others noticed. Darcy was stiff and her face stone cold. Yikes, I thought, is this going to go south? I knew this question hit a nerve for Darcy, but I also knew that she followed social mores and would not scream at Melissa nor walk away in a huff, but I did not know what was coming. Darcy looked at Melissa and asked in a low cool voice, 'why do you ask?' Melissa looked at her with a genuine smile and said 'I just think you would make such an awesome mother!' Wow. I felt the mood shift immediately in a positive direction for me and for Darcy. Darcy smiled back with a 'thank you' and the conversation continued and moved on to a discussion of favorite drinks recipes....

Darcy had reacted initially with a negative emotion to what Melissa seemed to have offered as an innocent question. Darcy's reaction was based on her own history and perceptions, her own appraisal of the situation that included her own personal hurt and frustration, but Melissa knew nothing about this. Melissa was in the moment, reacting to the person she saw in front of her, Darcy who would be a wonderful mother. It was fascinating to observe as an involved bystander, and helped remind me not to jump to conclusions when I feel a negative emotion rising in me. I may feel that a statement is hurtful, but I do not need to react with hurtfulness back immediately. I can think about being in the neutral part of the interpersonal circle and recognizing what is happening and then deciding what my goal is from there. Darcy was hurt, but managed to get to neutral on the circle and then set a goal to clarify. She was still upset, but because she was able to slow down, think about a goal, she was able to regulate her emotion. She could then respond in a more neutral manner, and ended up discovering new information that helped her shift her emotion even more. Even though Melissa said something that felt personal and hurtful to Darcy, she was able to respond from a place of neutrality and ask a question to clarify, instead of counter-attacking or withdrawing in hurt and anger. This allowed her space to learn something from the other person, this allowed more clarity. You may learn that your own stuff gets in the way sometimes. This is where reminding yourself about 'QTIP' or quit taking it personally can come in handy! Just because you feel irritated or angry does not necessarily mean that you are reading the situation correctly or that your negative emotion is justified. Using QTIP can then help you get to and respond from an interpersonally mindful place and not only regulate your emotions but also be more effective interpersonally!

Reduce Emotional Vulnerability

One of the first and most basic strategies to help address negative emotions or emotionality is to reduce your vulnerability to negative emotions. When we are working with individuals professionally, we often notice that they are ignoring fundamental components of their health and well-being. People are often not sleeping well, overeating or eating poor quality food, not exercising or moving their body. They are often fatigued, malnourished, abusing substances like nicotine, caffeine, or alcohol working too much, not doing pleasurable things, and so, when something happens that is even mildly irritating or aggravating, they have no emotional reserve and their negative emotions come tumbling (or exploding) out! I think of it like a water dam with water building up behind it. The water is the stress of life and the dam is our resources, well-being, and health that are all part of the tools it takes to move through life. If the dam is tended to, it can stay strong and effective, even during rising waters. If the dam is neglected, we are more vulnerable. If the dam is neglected too long in too many ways, the water will eventually wear down the barrier and break through or surge over the untended dam. We will be flooded with negative emotions.

There are very effective ways to reduce vulnerability to negative emotions, but we too often forget to think of them as strategies that we can actively use to take care of ourselves. These strategies and skills have been researched and shown to be effective and are used quite extensively in psychotherapies that address emotional dysregulation, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT; Linehan et al., 2007; Charles, 2010). DBT is a type of psychotherapy that combines current behavioral science with ancient Buddhist concepts like acceptance and mindfulness. This therapy has been demonstrated in scores of studies to be effective in treating borderline personality disorder and helping people more effectively regulate their emotions (Goodman et al., 2014). Dr. Marsha Linehan developed DBT to help people with out-of-control negative emotions begin to better understand and regulate their emotions in order to have a better chance for a good life. She is currently a professor of Psychology, and adjunct professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle.

One of the first things addressed in DBT is how to reduce emotional vulnerability. The idea is that if you are able to intentionally reduce your emotional vulnerability in a preventative manner, you are more likely to be able to regulate emotions successfully (Linehan, 1993). Recommended strategies include good old basics, such as taking care of your physical health and treating pain, eating a balanced diet, and avoiding excess sugar, fat, and caffeine, avoiding alcohol and drugs, getting regular and adequate sleep, getting regular exercise or moving your body every day and doing daily activities that build confidence, competency, or mastery (Linehan et al., 2007). The overall idea is to intentionally engage in these activities in an ongoing way to maintain baseline functioning and perhaps even increase positive emotions in an ongoing way. This helps to reduce your overall emotional vulnerability when additional stressors or challenging people or situations come your way. This does not mean that you will never feel bad, but it means that you may have more reserve to cope and be less likely to overreact when a stressor happens.

Accepting Emotions

Most social science research supports the idea that the attempt to control and avoid negative emotions once they are present can paradoxically maintain, and even intensify, emotional distress (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007). That is right – efforts to suppress painful emotional experiences seems to only increase suffering! We think that there are several reasons why trying to avoid negative emotions is harmful. One impact is that avoidance narrows your range and variety of experiences and behaviors – you are too busy avoiding and don't live your life! Additionally, attempts to avoid negative feelings are usually not successful and sometimes, even the fear of the impending negative experience becomes a negative experience in itself. Emotional avoidance can also involve denying the truth of a situation – the emotionally abused individual who denies the negative feelings and stays in a dangerous relationship, for example. Avoidance can also lead to anticipatory anxiety or worry that is often much worse than reality!

Emotions can be thought of as a piece of information to incorporate into our decision making, but not necessarily the only thing that should guide us. Emotions are just a part of being a human being. By accepting your emotional life, you are affirming your full humanity. Emotions are inevitable and can be useful. Research supports that one strategy to help decrease negative emotion is to accept it. An example would be Trina accepting her sadness over her losses as a normal response to lousy things happening in her life. Paradoxically, acceptance may allow us to pay less attention to the negative emotions, and therefore feel it less (Shallcross et al., 2013). So now, you can hopefully see why accepting emotions is a far better strategy than avoidance. When you accept the reality of your emotion, even though it may be hard or painful, you will find that it takes less energy than fighting or repressing it. Remember, acceptance doesn't mean that you like something or even think that it is right, it just means that you accept it is the reality. Trina felt sad about her losses, it was not fun, she did not like it, and maybe it wasn't fair, but it was true and real. Once the emotion is acknowledged, you can then focus on moving toward realist goals. If Trina can accept that she is sad and feels lonely, she can then begin to move forward. There is a famous quote widely attributed to Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom during World War II: 'If you're going through hell, keep going.' He was talking about the unpleasant necessity of fighting unparalleled evil in the form of the Nazis, but this may also apply to getting through our most difficult negative emotions. When you accept a negative emotion, it tends to lose its destructive power.

Emotional acceptance allows you to acknowledge that you have the emotion and decide not to do anything about it. It is like moving into the neutral part of the interpersonal circle and observing yourself in the situation. You notice where you are pulled emotionally, but intentionally decide to accept and observe instead of reacting or rejecting the emotions. As we stated, emotional acceptance is related to decreased negative emotions, and guess what? Emotional acceptance is also related to increased resilience. For example, people who accept their negative emotions when they are stressed experience fewer negative emotions than people who don't accept their emotions (Shallcross et al., 2010). This acceptance is one of the core processes of mindfulness, which involves a number of different psychological processes. One component of mindfulness is to be aware of your emotional and psychological states, and another component is to practice nonreactance or acceptance. Accepting your emotions and not being threatened by them may be enough to get you through, but you may need to learn to more actively regulate your emotions as well.

Regulating Emotions

Emotional regulation has been studied extensively by psychologists and social scientists, and is informed by the research on why and how humans have emotions (Gross, 2007). Many of us use emotion regulation skills automatically (like reflexively closing your eyes when something scary happens), but there are times when we need to make conscious and concerted efforts to regulate our emotions. Several of the psychotherapy systems, such as DBT (Linehan, 1993) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes et al., 2012) incorporate strategies and methods for regulating emotions. Some psychotherapies, such as Emotion Regulation Therapy (Mennin & Fresco, 2014) and Emotion

Efficacy Therapy (McKay & West, 2016) are almost exclusively based upon learning such skills. Each of these psychotherapy systems has its own literature and research and we would encourage you to explore them further to explore their contributions to effective emotional regulation strategies. We will review some of the commonly shared approaches to regulating negative emotion and increasing positive affect.

So, what are you supposed to do when you have a negative emotion and you cannot accept it? Are there other ways to decrease negative emotions? The answer is yes. There are approaches to regulating emotions that work. As we discussed, acceptance certainly helps ease suffering, but not all of us can move into acceptance with every negative emotion. Another effective strategy that has been researched and demonstrated to work involves reappraising the situation that is related to the emotion. Reappraisal is cognitive in nature, which means that it involves how you think about and reframe a situation. The idea is that you literally reappraise the situation that led up to your emotional experience and this can alter your emotional response (Gross, 1998). For example, if you got into an argument with a friend, you could reappraise the experience as a valuable disagreement that will ultimately deepen the friendship, instead of focusing on the hurt of the situation.

Research has shown that people who use reappraisal strategies are able to reframe stressful situations by reinterpreting the meaning of negative emotional stimuli. Reappraisal can be informed by our own values and can help us move in the positive direction we want for our life. Another example might be related to Trina and her negative emotions related to the death of her dog (which, she stated, upset her far more than breaking up with her boyfriend!). When we worked through her sadness about losing her dog, I asked her about her dog and why she decided to adopt him. She stated that she rescued her dog, Sport, from the pound and that she valued caring for him. She thought of herself as a caring pet owner and stated that she enjoyed his companionship. When then explored how if Trina's value-driven mission is to have pets in her life, then she also needs to be able to reappraise their ultimate loss. The cost of valuing the companionship of pets is that they can get hurt or die and this hurts. When I asked Trina if she could do it over again – would she adopt Sport, she said yes. So, with this information, she was able to reappraise her negative mood and see it as honoring a powerful and important relationship in her life, a relationship that was a manifestation of her own values. She was able to accept her sadness as honoring Sport. Her emotions were a piece of information about the loss, but they were not the only or defining component. She was able to reappraise her hurt and sadness as evidence that she had a deep connection with Sport and this was important to her. She would not choose to avoid the pain of his loss by never having adopted him. This knowledge helped her regulate her sadness and instead focus on the happy memories of being with him. Trina ultimately ended up fostering four dogs over the next year and told me that it was her way of honoring her values and honoring Sport.

While acceptance and reappraisal have different goals both have the same outcome: decreased experience of negative emotion. There is research support for both of these emotion regulation strategies presented and they seem to effectively decrease negative emotions and increase psychological health (Hopp et al., 2011; Mauss et al., 2007; Shallcross et al., 2010). This is good news, that both strategies work and that reducing vulnerability is also effective. It is also important to remember the overall context of the situation when thinking about which method of emotional regulation to use. One strategy may work better in a certain situation than another. For instance, if you are in a situation where you have some legitimate control over the stressor (it is in your circle of control or influence), it may be best to do what you can to solve the issue instead of reappraising. Research from the lab of Dr. Iris Mauss, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, has found, for instance, that the ability to reappraise protected stressed participants from depression, but only when the stress was uncontrollable (like the loss of a pet). When stress was more controllable (like a conflict with a partner), greater reappraisal ability was associated with more depressive symptoms (Troy et al., 2010).

There is another strategy for regulating emotions which is suppression. Suppression is basically still experiencing the emotion, but inhibiting its behavioral expressions. In Trina's case this might mean, feeling sad over the death of her dog, but not allowing any expression of these emotions. Another example might be when you get mad at your partner about something and decide not to show it. Suppression is considered to be a more negative type of emotion regulation. This is because it can be confusing to other people and thus creates a risk for more hurt or negative emotions. It also does not really regulate the emotional experience, only the behavioral component of the emotion. If you are mad and don't show it behaviorally, you still have feelings of anger, and you are at risk for confusing other people about what is going on. Additionally, suppression takes continuous effort to control and suppress emotions, and this can be exhausting and also can create feelings of inauthenticity. Research by Dr. James Gross and colleagues at Stanford University has shown that people who used suppression for emotional regulation were less able to repair their negative moods, despite 'masking' their inner feelings. They experienced fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions, and had less life satisfaction and less self-esteem (Gross & John, 2003). That is a pretty high price to pay to avoid emotional behavior!

Culture and other factors also play a role in our ability to regulate emotions. Emotion regulation depends on the intuitive beliefs and mindsets people hold about their own emotions. If I think about emotions as something that I can influence, then I may naturally be more likely to use reappraisal skills to regulate my emotion. If I have a concept that I am a victim of emotions and that they are something that I cannot impact, it naturally will not occur to me that I can reappraise the situation and impact my emotions. Thus, part of learning emotion regulation skills may involve exploring your own personal and cultural assumptions about emotions, and perhaps challenging and altering your own mindset and beliefs.

Increasing Positive Emotion: Practicing Gratitude

So far we have been talking about reducing negative emotion, but we know that we can also regulate our mood in other ways. For example, we can positively impact our mood and increase positive emotions such as happiness through specific practices, such as gratitude. Psychologists define gratitude as a positive emotional response that we perceive upon giving or receiving a benefit from someone (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Gratitude has long been conceptualized as an important and powerful emotion and practice. Marcus Tullius Cicero, a philosopher and statesman in the Roman Empire, is attributed with saying that 'Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.' Research shows that gratitude is a positive psychological booster for sure! Not only do grateful people seem to engage in helpful habits when they're faced with stress, but research suggests that gratitude also changes our experience of negative emotions in positive ways (Bryan et al., 2018).

Recent research by Dr. Paulo Boggio and his colleagues in Brazil (Boggio et al., 2019) demonstrated that writing about gratitude for a month helped people significantly decrease their emotional reactions to negative images that presumably would normally cause distress and negative emotion. Why would writing about what you are grateful for have this impact? The researchers suggest that gratitude might help people to cultivate a more positive attitude toward life in general that allowed them to protect their positive emotional state (Boggio et al., 2019). But something else might have been going on as well. The researchers also found an interesting result when they looked at the types of words that participants had used in their gratitude writings. People who wrote about what they were grateful for used more words related to cognitive processes experienced (for example, words about other ways of thinking about things). Since these types of words would be involved in the process of reappraising negative events, the researchers suggest that the gratitude group may have been better at reframing when viewing the negative pictures. This healthy emotion regulation strategy, which grateful people are inclined toward, might be key in helping them manage their negative emotions. Thus, maybe we can increase our ability to reappraise by intentionally practicing gratitude!

Scores of studies show that people who practice being grateful report significantly higher levels of happiness and psychological well-being than those who do not. They are able to reduce vulnerability to negative emotions this way. This leads to all kinds of good things for people who practice gratitude – improved mood, less stress, better sleep, happy relationships, and even reduced cellular aging!

One of the leading scholars in the field of gratitude is Dr. Robert A. Emmons, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis. He is the author of several books on gratitude and endorses that the best way to start practicing gratitude is to keep a journal to identify things in your life for which you are grateful each day. He recommends that you think of these things as gifts, which will underscore their importance as something positive. He also encourages each of us to really slow down and take the time to truly reflect on each thing we are grateful for.

Personally, while writing this book during the COVID-19 crisis, both Morgan and I found our own gratitude practices to be incredibly valuable. Practicing gratitude, either by consciously bringing gratitude to mind throughout the day, giving thanks out loud, or writing down what you are grateful for helps anchor you in reality and focus on what you can control. Gratitude gives us something to focus on that we can change – our thoughts. We don't need good things to happen to us to be grateful, we need to reframe our thoughts about what has happened. If you are breathing and conscious, there is typically always something to be grateful for and bringing that gratitude to the forefront feels good.

Decreasing Emotional Suffering

Dr. Marsha Linehan talks about the importance of reducing emotional suffering as a necessary part of emotion regulation in DBT (Linehan, 1993). She describes the two skills needed to reduce emotional suffering as letting go and taking opposite action. Letting go is just as it sounds. The idea is to first become aware of the emotion you are experiencing, and this is through being mindful. Once you are aware of the emotion, you can name it, and then let it go. Let it go instead of avoiding, dwelling on, or fighting it. This might involve taking a breath and visualizing the emotion dissolving, or picturing the emotion as a wave that comes and goes. I have had patients visualize tying the emotion on a balloon and releasing it to the sky. Some imagine handing it over to a higher power. The second skill is called taking opposite action. This literally means that you behave in ways opposite to the negative emotion. For example, if Trina is sad about her breakup, instead of staying in bed and crying, she might decide to clean her apartment, or call a friend to meet for lunch. It is important to remember that this skill is not aimed at denying the current emotion. The idea is to be mindful, name the emotion and let it go. You can then act in an opposite way, in order to further help regulate your emotion.

Cultivating Forgiveness

Janet, a 54-year-old single mother of two, was a patient of mine who had a similar problem with a negative emotion that she could not shake. She showed up in my office, angry, depressed, and clearly not living a good life. She reported that 3 years ago, her son betrayed her and her family. She went on to explain that she had been working two jobs and trying to support her sons, and not home much in the past several years. She had been devastated when she discovered her 19-year-old son's drug use when he was arrested for possession of drugs with intent to distribute. Even after her son did his jail time, was released and doing well in recovery, she was still suffering from anger and could not forgive him. She was miserable but could not get over her indignance and fury about what he had done. She did not want to feel this way, but could not figure out how to make it better.

Sometimes we are hanging onto a negative emotion because we have trouble forgiving someone or something. Forgiveness is a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or a desire for revenge against someone who has hurt you. It may be given to someone who does not want or deserve your forgiveness. Unforgiveness is the opposite. It is a reaction to a perceived transgression and is a combination of emotions, including resentment, hostility, hatred, bitterness, anger, or fear. Unforgiveness has been described as carrying around a red hot rock, intending to someday throw it back at the person who hurt you. Obviously, the red hot rock does more damage to the person holding on to it than anyone else. Forgiving allows you to release the burden of anger and pain and lay that hot rock down. Forgiveness also allows you to move forward with your life. One of the most interesting things about this concept, if that forgiveness and unforgiveness are under our control.

One of the most prolific researchers in the field of forgiveness is Dr. Everett Worthington, Jr., who is a counseling psychologist and Professor Emeritus at the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Worthington proposes that there are two kinds of forgiveness: decisional and emotional. Decisional forgiveness consists of making a decision not to hold an offense against someone, and to restore the relationship to the way it was before the offense occurred. Emotional forgiveness consists of changing your thoughts and feelings toward someone who has offended you from negative emotions to neutral or even positive ones. Emotional forgiveness does not mean that a person's hurtful actions are forgotten; instead, over time, emotional forgiveness enables you to replace negative feelings associated with the memory of those actions with positive ones. Emotional forgiveness is usually more difficult to give than decisional forgiveness, but it can also be deeper and longer lasting. Complete emotional forgiveness is what happens when we truly let go of all of our hurt and anger and replace those feelings with empathy, compassion, and love. Decisional and emotional forgiveness are not mutually exclusive. Many times, forgiveness starts with a decision to grant forgiveness, not hold a grudge for a past offense, and then the work can be done to help promote emotional forgiveness (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Dr. Worthington, Jr., in his research explored ways to help people intentionally move toward forgiveness and changing their emotions. Decades of research led to the development of his REACH model of striving for forgiveness (Worthington, Jr., 2005). This model is an active, intentional process of forgiving and includes the steps below.

> R – Recall the hurt. Allow yourself to experience and acknowledge the pain and anger associated with the transgression.
> E – Empathize with the offender by allowing yourself to see things from their perspective and understand the circumstances they may have been facing.
> A – Altruistically offer the gift of forgiveness. This is not about the person who hurt you, but about you choosing to release them from your anger and pain.
> C – Commit publicly to forgive by telling someone that you intentionally choose to forgive. The purpose of committing publicly to forgiveness is to help you remember your decision and stand by it.
> H – Hold on to forgiveness and stay true to your decision.

Doing the work of forgiveness is not easy, however, the benefits of working to forgive are substantial. Studies and clinical practice have demonstrated the effectiveness of the REACH program. Forgiveness can benefit your mind and body. Studies have shown that forgiveness reduces rates of anxiety and depression, contributes to better sleep, and lowers blood pressure and cholesterol (Toussaint et al., 2015; Worthington & Sandage, 2016). A truly amazing testament to the power of the REACH method is the fact that Dr. Worthington himself used it to help him forgive the man who brutally raped and murdered his 78-year-old mother in Tennessee in 1995. Using the paradigm he had taught so successfully to hundreds of people, he used the REACH program to forgive his own mother's murderer (Weir, 2017).

Kim's Update on Janet and Reflections on Forgiveness

Janet and I worked together for 6 months using the REACH program. It was hard but gratifying work. In the first month, we sketched out a time-line along with our therapeutic approach and plan. She diligently followed the steps and was genuinely motivated to move forward, and still sometimes struggled. She gradually discovered that she could empathize with her son, loosen the grip of anger, and intentionally let go of the painful emotions she had been holding on to. Ultimately, she did forgive her son publicly and reported a feeling of relief to be connected emotionally to him again in a more adaptive way. She ultimately was able to give her son and herself the gift of forgiveness.

It seems like people these days are less and less willing to do the work of pursuing forgiveness. Revenge and payback are too quick and easy and satisfying. Ironically, it seems to me that learning the skill of forgiveness only becomes more important as you age, and that society today could certainly benefit from more people learning to forgive. Forgiveness is almost sometimes seen as weak, when in fact, I think of forgiveness as the ultimate place of strength and centeredness. I am hopeful that with recent international events, including COVID-19, our society will wake up to the reality of our interdependence and connectedness and the central importance of forgiveness and compassion. Perhaps renewed awareness of our need to collaborate in order to save each other will help foster the hard work and substantial satisfaction of pursuing forgiveness.

Morgan's Story

Forgiveness is a powerful tool that is not necessarily easy to practice, but can be incredibly transformative. While forgiveness can be practiced in situations such as Janet's for deep-seated feelings of negativity, I have found that forgiveness is also pertinent to daily life.

When I'm not working on this book or doing yoga, I work full-time in a corporate office where I often provide customer service for clients who require assistance with a thorough application and annual reporting process. The application process in particular can be arduous, and sometimes applicants miss deadlines and be assessed a fee, or receive adverse decisions on their applications. I recall one day when a client called our office and spoke to me, enraged that their application had received an adverse decision and that they had been assessed a late fee since they had not submitted materials on time. The interaction began in a negative tone with the client immediately complaining and speaking negatively about our office's processes and customer service. Of course, our office had clearly stated that late fees would be assessed for missed deadlines and that applications sometimes received adverse decisions based on specific criteria, so I felt that our efforts had not been appreciated by the customer. Although I felt frustrated, I maintained a professional demeanor, while the client spiraled into a frenzy of anger and negativity. The conversation ended abruptly after I calmly asked the customer to contact us at a later date when they were better able to communicate professionally and they cursed at me and hung up before I could finish my sentence. I was shocked and hurt, and I allowed myself to experience those feelings for a moment. I knew that ultimately the conversation wasn't about me – perhaps the customer was having a bad day or dealing with another problem, and the decision and fee had tipped them over the edge. I thought about it this way: *This person has already taken up negative space in my brain. I will not allow their negative energy to take up any more space in my brain or impact my day.* Although the customer had not apologized for their inappropriate behavior, I chose to forgive them and let go of the negativity of the conversation instead of holding a grudge or allowing the negativity I felt from my interaction with them fester. I mentioned my commitment to forgive them to my co-workers, who had kindly offered support after the interaction. I found that after forgiving this customer, I was able to return to my normal self and show up for my co-workers and other clients with a positive attitude.

What You Can Do for Yourself and Others Now

Coping with Strong Emotions Is Good for You and Those Around You!

Goal

- To use effective emotional regulation skills in order to cope with negative emotions

Technique:

- Acknowledge your feeling: Notice and identify the fact that your strong negative emotions have been triggered. This is especially important when you've been ambushed by an emotion. It helps to say clearly to yourself, 'I'm feeling angry,' or, 'I'm sad,' or, 'I'm upset.' You can think about where you are on the interpersonal circle if that helps. You don't have to over analyze the feeling
- Pause: Stop yourself from acting on the feeling. To do this, focus on your breathing, following your breath as it moves in and out through your nostrils. Take three good deep breaths and count to ten and then breath and count to ten again
- Get grounded: When we're experiencing strong emotions, we often lose touch with our physical body. To get grounded inside your body, bring your attention to the sensation of your feet on the ground; if you're sitting, feel the contact between your buttocks and the cushion or floor
- Explore the feeling in your body: Focus on the feeling. Where is it in your body? How does it feel? Notice if there's a color field around your mood

- Let go of the story line: At this point, you'll notice that certain thoughts are attached to your particular emotion, thoughts that frequently begin 'How could he?' or 'I always…' Acknowledge these thoughts and then let them go, keeping your attention on the feeling rather than getting caught up in your personal story line. If you are feeling overwhelmed with the emotion and it is difficult to think, it may be best to remove yourself from the situation if possible. You can go splash water on your face, have a drink of water, take a quick brisk walk. You can think of this as leaving the interpersonal circle all together for a time
- Establish your value-driven realistic and attainable goal: Think about how you want to respond thoughtfully. What is important to you and in line with your values. When you look back on this in a few weeks, what can you do that you will be proud of? Align your behaviors, actions, words, to work toward that goal in the moment. If you can't do something to make the situation better, then you can focus on a goal of not making it worse

Evidence

- There is strong evidence that learning to effectively regulate emotions is an adaptive and important skill and can reduce stress and stress-related physical disorders. Effectively coping with strong emotions is also associated with more effective interpersonal interactions and facilitation of goals

Suggestion for Use

- Remember that you have the power to control your emotions. You can choose to change the way you feel and the way you respond. You can begin by taking ownership of your emotions and recognizing that others do not 'make' you feel a certain way. You alone own your emotions. You can begin to use these strategies by intentionally acknowledging your feelings and perhaps learning additional words to help you describe your emotions and identify them in your body. Additionally, it may be helpful to notice patterns of what triggers strong emotions in you, in order to begin to better understand your own emotions and learn strategies to discriminate past emotions from present situations

Potential Barriers and How to Overcome

- It can be difficult to think that you can control your strong negative emotions. It may be easy to simply react to things happening around you and quickly lose control of your emotions. This is especially true if you are more emotionally vulnerable. Strategies to help prevent being emotionally vulnerable include getting enough sleep, eating regularly and staying healthy with exercise and avoiding mood altering substances. Your ability to control strong emotions will get better with practice

Movement Exercise

Opening Your Heart

Mindful movement has been one of the most powerful ways that I've personally coped with overwhelming emotions. In this series of movements, our focus will be on opening our chest or heart center, and many of the poses listed below activate the heart chakra. As you move through the sequence below, feel free to go at your own pace and omit or add any additional movements that feel good to you. You know your body best!

1. Stand tall, grounding in mountain pose. Inhale as you lift your arms to the sky
2. Exhale and fold forward, reaching toward the earth. You may bend your knees as much as you'd like
3. Inhale and continue reaching toward the earth, flattening the back
4. Exhale, walk the feet back and lay your palms flat on the earth so that you find yourself in a plank position. As you inhale, place your knees on the ground, shift your body forward slightly, and lay your forearms on the earth in front of your chest, heart open, for sphinx pose. Exhale as you settle into the pose
5. In sphinx pose, repeat this phrase, used to describe the pose in *Integrative Yoga Therapy Yoga Toolbox for Teachers and Students,* to yourself: 'As I open the doorway to my heart, I naturally receive wisdom and guidance' (Le Page, 2015)
6. If desired, on your next inhale, press your palms to the floor and straighten your forearms, keeping your legs straight behind you, coming into cobra pose. In cobra, repeat this phrase to yourself: 'I open my heart and rise up to receive the subtle energy of the goddess within me' (Le Page, 2015)
7. On your exhale, curl your toes under and lift your seat to the sky, gazing toward the belly, to come into downward dog pose
8. You may stay in downward dog for a few breaths, pedaling the feet or switching the hips from side to side if desired
9. Inhale as you walk your feet forward until you find yourself in a standing forward fold position. Exhale, forward fold, inhale, bring hands above the head to the sky, and exhale, bringing your palms together at the heart center, focusing on that heart chakra center. Imagine a beautiful green light emitting from your heart chakra
10. Inhale, bring the hands up to the sky again and repeat the sequence once more

11 When you find yourself in cobra, lower yourself back to the earth and lay your arms by your sides, palms facing the sky. To prepare for locust pose, which has the core quality of grounding with lightness through life's challenges, you may stabilize yourself through the pelvis and abdomen and slowly lift one leg off of the ground toward the sky
12 If you feel stable with one leg lifted, you may lift your other leg so that both legs hover above the ground, lifted with the gaze toward the earth. You may choose to only lift one leg as well, or you may use props such as blankets or blocks to place under the upper thighs. Hands may also come to the side of the body, palms facing down on the ground
13 In locust pose, repeat this phrase to yourself: 'With lightness and stability, I embrace all challenges along my journey' (Le Page, 2015)
14 Keeping this sentiment in mind, lower the entire body to the floor, curling the toes and lifting the seat for downward dog. Walk the feet to meet the hands and come to a seated position with your legs in front of you. Inhale, extend arms to the sky, and exhale, reach forward for a fold
15 Before savasana, take any other poses or stretches that may feel good. Once finished, lay flat on your back, facing upward, with the arms by your side and legs extended, slightly apart. You may want to set a timer for 10 minutes, or at least 7 minutes. Breathe deeply, allowing yourself to fully relax, and continue to focus on that heart center
16 After your timer sets off, wiggle your fingers and toes, gently bringing yourself to a comfortable seated position. Bringing hands to heart, thank yourself for taking time to nourish your heart center and know that you can bring this energy into all aspects of your day

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10 Feeling Crappy? Coping with Pain

David's Story

My husband, David who is 53 years old, broke his ankle playing basketball in high school when he was 16. He was told to walk it off by his coach and father, who was in the stands! It was only later, after horrible swelling and pain that he went to the hospital and they found the break. For those of you reading who are over 50, this may be a familiar story. Many of us in the older generations were raised to 'work through the pain' and not complain. I have been told similar tales by my father, uncle, and grandmothers regarding how to cope with pain by persevering. This may be a generational issue, a personal value, or a societal mandate, and it has its value for sure for dealing with acute pain. In dealing with chronic pain, however, strategies may need to be adjusted. We have come a long way in treating pain, but perhaps it has been in the wrong direction. We have developed powerful pain medications but also seen the downside of these medications. In many ways, we are waking up to the realization of the complexities of pain and thus, the need for a more comprehensive approach to dealing with pain, especially chronic pain.

Kim's Story

As a child, I experienced frequent debilitating classic migraine headaches, which continued into adulthood and only now, in my 50s, have subsided. These are the kind of headaches where the pain is so intense that it makes you vomit. There is not only pain but sensitivities and auras – both visually and emotionally. Light and any noise or touch are excruciating. The sense of unrealness, dread, vertigo, and the visual aura were misery. One of my first memories is a vision of the fortification spectra that comes with a migraine. It's called this because it looks like the top of a fortress that's fortified for war, but the image also moves and spirals. It is a sickening image because the movement can make you dizzy (it stays in your field of vision even when you close your eyes) and it is a signal of worsening pain. The learned association and dread of an upcoming headache was almost as bad as the migraine itself. I believe that dealing with this pain from such a young age compelled me to learn strategies to manage it. I could not escape the migraines and medications only made me drowsy, constipated, and nauseous, but never really made the pain go away.

I remember learning early on to notice subtle changes over time in the pain. My pain was not a solid, unchanging thing, but instead it was an undulating, flowing thing. I learned later in my academic studies that this experience of noticing subtle changes in pain is a strategy for coping with pain or other uncomfortable experiences such as cravings. It is sometimes called 'riding the wave' and is similar to surfing a wave of pain or urges. Other effective strategies included a type of mindfulness that I automatically engaged in as a young child. This kind of being with the pain and not reacting to it or fighting it helped me survive decades of migraines. I am grateful for the knowledge I gained from that time. I am also happy to say that I have been migraine free for several years now and savor every moment of comfort. Coping with pain also helped me recognize and celebrate the times when I was pain-free. This is a wonderful strategy to help promote and build feelings of gratitude. Notice when you have no pain and celebrate this. Really feel it and appreciate it. If your teeth are not hurting right now, celebrate that! If you notice that your scalp and head are pain-free and relaxed, enjoy that feeling and sink into it, be with it and enjoy it. If you notice a lack of tension or stress in your shoulders or jaw, enjoy that and move them around freely, experiencing the relief and satisfaction that comes with simply being pain-free, or mostly pain free!

Prevalence and Impact of Pain

Chronic noncancer pain is typically defined as pain lasting longer than 3 months or beyond the expected period of healing of tissue pathology (Turk, Wilson & Cahana, 2011).

Chronic pain and the associated symptoms and consequences, such as fatigue, are recognized as a major public health problem worldwide. Pain produces significant economic and social burden, not to mention the emotional costs it imposes (Breivik et al., 2006; Dueñas et al., 2015; Langley, 2011; Leadley et al., 2012). Rates of people suffering from chronic pain worldwide range from 10% to 40% depending on the population studied, and often that does not include pain related to cancer, which would significantly increase the numbers (Dahlhamer et al., 2018; Reid et al., 2011). I don't know about you, but that number is shockingly high to me! In this day and age, with all of our advances in prevention and medical care, it seems remarkable that so many people suffer from pain. Pain conditions not only affect the person suffering from the pain but also their families, social circle, and work (Dueñas et al., 2015). Chronic pain is one of the most common reasons adults seek medical care (Schappert & Burt, 2006). Chronic pain has been linked to restrictions in mobility and daily activities, dependence on opioids, anxiety and depression, poor health, and reduced quality of life (Gureje et al.,1998; Simon, 2012; Smith et al., 2001). Obviously, pain is a big problem in the world and not going away anytime soon!

Over the years, it has become clear to me that pain manifests differently in people. Pain is common, yet unique to each person suffering with it. Some individuals seem to be highly sensitive to pain, whereas others seem to be surprisingly insensitive. This is why knee pain or stomach cramps can be sheer agony for one person and merely annoying to another. Part of this is due to the fact that there are two steps in pain perception. The first step is the biological or physiological component and the second is the perception of pain by the brain, which is more subjective and may change from person to person. Pain is thus defined as a biochemical transmission of an unpleasant sensation as well as an emotional experience. A person's past experiences, including learning history and trauma experiences, influence a person's sensitivity to pain, making an individual's tolerance to pain is as unique in each person. Research has demonstrated that self-reports of pain intensity are highly correlated to brain activation, and that, contrary to what we may often think, self-reports of pain are fairly accurate (Larkin, 2003). There are some predictable biological and psychological factors that are associated with higher likelihood of pain. These include having certain chronic diseases like diabetes, having depression or anxiety symptoms, being obese, being a smoker, and being a red-head (Liem et al., 2005; Stamer & Stüber, 2007). We can control some of these factors more than others. For instance, we certainly cannot control whether we are born red-headed, but we may be able to treat our illnesses, lose weight or quit smoking.

Addressing Pain and Related Symptoms

Addressing pain is important not only to relieve suffering but also because we know that pain can lead to other complications and difficulties. Chronic pain can lead to a chronic stress reaction that causes an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. This stress reaction can lead to harmful health effects, such as a reduced ability to fight off illness and infection, including an increased risk for conditions such as heart disease (Fine, 2011). Pain left unchecked also causes fatigue, decreased energy, and often negatively impacts functioning (Elliott et al., 2003; Vlaeyen & Linton, 2000). Chronic pain is also associated with increased depression, anxiety, and frustration (Suso-Ribera et al., 2016).

Because the phenomenon of chronic pain is multifactorial, it has long been conceptualized using the biopsychosocial model popularized by Dr. George Engel in the late 1970s. The biopsychosocial model was proposed by Dr. Engel, a psychiatrist who voiced concern over the narrow focus of the biomedical model based on his own experiences with patients. The biopsychosocial model, which is largely accepted today as the best way to conceptualize and understand chronic pain, posits that each person's pain is affected by physiological, psychological, and social factors, and that one or more of these factors may play a critical role in the development and maintenance of chronic pain.

Interestingly, although pain is generally accepted as a complex phenomenon that is impacted by previous history, physiological abnormalities, cognitive perceptions, emotional factors, coping styles, and social and financial resources, one singular treatment approach as dominated. Oral medications have been the mainstay of treatment for over a century (Turk et al., 2011). The use of drugs to treat pain has expanded exponentially in recent years, and we are all too familiar now with the recent increase in opioid use and abuse and the resulting crisis (Vadivelu et al., 2018). It would seem that utilization of only oral medications for pain is an unwise path forward for treatment. Certainly, pain medications have their place in the treatment of pain, and yet, I am all too familiar with the impotence of even high doses of medications and the unpleasant toxic side effects in my own experience, as well as that of my patients.

Most clinicians currently propose that the ideal treatment for chronic pain is a broad and comprehensive approach that addresses a person's physical, emotional, and mental needs. Successful treatment requires choosing a life-long plan of wellness that may include working with multiple providers and definitely includes the patient working toward acceptance and active coping (Turk et al., 2003). There are multiple psychological approaches to treating chronic pain that have demonstrated effectiveness. These therapies fall into four categories: operant-behavioral therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy (Thorn et al., 2007). We will focus on the strategies and skills from these therapeutic approaches that may be most helpful in addressing pain and related symptoms. These therapeutic approaches have been demonstrated not so much to reduce actual pain, but to improve coping and related functioning. Remember, we are talking about pain that has not responded to traditional medications, surgeries, injections, etc. Not everyone experiences this kind of pain, but for those who do, the idea is not necessarily to make the pain completely go away, but instead learn to live with the pain more successfully.

Similar to strategies for coping with emotions, there are differing approaches to chronic pain that involve thinking about what can be controlled versus what cannot be controlled. Chronic pain by definition is intractable and presumably not under the immediate control of the person suffering from it. However, just like a negative emotion, the pain can definitely be made worse by lack of acceptance or by behaviors and thoughts that exacerbate symptoms and worsen suffering. The goal is to ease suffering by helping the person in chronic pain to accept and be with the pain in more therapeutic ways and not make the pain or suffering worse.

Acceptance

Unfortunately, chronic pain can lead to avoidance where people stop doing fun things and avoid activities because of fear of pain. As a child with migraines, I, Kim, could have easily succumbed to this fear and avoidance. Instead my mother, who also suffered from migraines her entire life, encouraged me to participate in life and not let the fear of a migraine keep me from missing anything. I owe her a great debt for this encouragement, and because of her early involvement I continued and still continue to participate in life with less fear. She is deceased now, and when I look back to my childhood, I realize that she did not let her pain get in the way either. She was always present and involved as a mother. I knew she had migraines, and she did not hide it, and she also did not let it rule her life.

When the goal becomes to avoid pain, people avoid other positive things and can actually make their situation worse. Acceptance refers to no longer struggling with the fact of pain, no longer avoiding the idea of pain, and learning to live a good life despite the pain. Acceptance is associated with lower levels of pain, disability, and psychological distress (Lachapelle et al., 2008). Acceptance of pain is a tenet of most of the psychotherapy approaches for pain, including a psychotherapeutic system called ACT, which has been demonstrated repeatedly to help patients cope with chronic pain (Hughes et al., 2017). ACT was developed by Dr. Steven Hayes in the early 1980s (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012) as a blend of cognitive and behavioral therapy. The objective of ACT is not elimination of difficult feelings or sensations, but instead to be present and move forward based on values (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). You can easily see how this is very applicable to dealing with pain. ACT invites people to open up to unpleasant feelings, learn not to overreact to them, and not avoid situations where pain may occur. The idea is that by accepting and not avoiding, this helps facilitate psychological flexibility which is healthy and adaptive (Hughes et al., 2017).

What does acceptance look like? It looks a lot like what I used during my migraine headaches. I embraced the fact that pain was a part of my life, and accepted when the pain came. This is what would be called ‘psychological flexibility’ in the ACT approach. This flexibility encourages letting go of control of the pain, allowing the reality that pain is part of life. Remember, acceptance does not mean that you like the pain or think it is good or right, instead it means that you acknowledge the reality that it exists. This allows you to then approach unpleasant thoughts, emotions, memories, and sensations from a place of acceptance. Psychological flexibility allows a person to live consciously moment to moment. Acceptance helps promote engagement in activities and actions that may include some unwanted pain, and learning to be OK with this and not feel the need to control the negative feelings. This approach allows for the possibility that you can still do what you want and live a good life even with pain present.

Ricky’s Story

Ricky was a 70-year-old divorced father of one, and a recovered drug addict with a history of anxiety and depression. I met him when he was referred to me because he was becoming verbally abusive with the nursing staff in the infusion center at the University hospital. When I met Ricky, he was angry and in pain. He had metastatic lung cancer that had been treated aggressively. He was suffering from neuropathy in his feet and reported pain at a level of 20+ on a 0–10 points scale! He was furious that the medications that he was given by his palliative care physicians were not making his pain better. In working with Ricky, it became clear that he expected to have zero pain, even in his current medical condition. This was an unrealistic expectation but Ricky would not accept anything less. He constantly focused on the pain. He frequently verbalized how the pain was unrelenting and unfair. He angrily repeated over and over how severe the pain was and that nobody was helping him. It was clear that he was suffering. I also discovered that he did not really understand that the pain most likely would not significantly improve. In therapy together over the next several months, we focused on helping him accept his pain and all this meant – including him letting go of suffering and his negative emotions. We discussed what kinds of things he wanted to do now that his treatments were over in an attempt to discover what he thought the pain was keeping him from. He wanted to be able to play with his 7-year-old granddaughter. We discussed what was holding him back and how he could overcome it. He had overcome difficult things in the past, such as his drug addiction, in order to be with his granddaughter and we helped him remember the flexibility, resilience, and strength he had to do that. Mostly, we focused on helping him see that he could go after his value-based goals (playing with his granddaughter) without his pain stopping him all together. He was finally able to accept that pain was going to be part of his life, and that this did not mean his life was over, just different.

Cognitive Appraisal

How we think about pain influences our pain experience more than we may realize. This is one of the tenets of a therapeutic approach called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for chronic pain (CBT-CP; Ehde et al., 2014). CBT is based on the work of Dr. Aaron Beck, and incorporates the importance of the impact of thoughts and beliefs upon mood and behavior. One of the premises of the CBT approach to chronic pain is that maladaptive thoughts about pain can maintain or worsen pain symptoms. Thus, changing negative thoughts and beliefs can change awareness and perception of pain even if the actual level of pain stays the same. Many of us have been conditioned to have negative or fearful thoughts about or associations with pain or other unpleasant sensations. These can be thoughts such as 'This pain will never end!' or 'I cannot tolerate this pain!' similar to Ricky's thoughts about his pain. Thoughts can be so automatic and familiar that we are not even aware of them. These same thoughts significantly impact behavior or mood, including pain perception. Negative thoughts about pain can lead to maladaptive coping, exacerbation of pain, increased suffering, and even greater disability (Ehde, Dillworth, & Turner, 2014; Lawrence, Hoeft, Sheau, & Mackey, 2011).

Research shows that negative thoughts are directly associated with pain perception (Lawrence, Hoeft, Sheau, & Mackey, 2011). Becoming aware of these unhelpful thoughts and beginning to bring them to conscious awareness is one of the strategies of many empirically supported psychotherapeutic systems. Cognitive therapy approaches often call these Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs), and promote examining the thoughts once you are aware of them (Beck & Dozois, 2011). Specifically, the thought can be examined and challenged instead of just accepted. For instance, with Ricky's thought 'I cannot tolerate this pain,' I asked him to ask himself if that is 100% true. He realized that he was actually enduring the pain, so his thought was not 100% true. This helped him update his thoughts and he told himself something like 'This pain is bad, and I am handling it.' Having this revised thought, allowed Ricky to be with his pain and not make it worse. He had a more realistic view of his pain and did not catastrophize it.

Some other questions that can you can ask yourself in order to help revise your automatic thoughts are:

- Is there a different way to look at this situation
- What would I tell someone I love if they had this thought
- Is this thought helpful to me, does it help me get to my goal
- Is there anything I am missing, a piece that I haven't thought of

As you may figure out, once you ask yourself these questions, you may have a more balanced and realistic view of the situation. Replacing automatic negative and maladaptive thoughts with more accurate and relevant thoughts will help you cope better and allow you to practice more effective pain management. Cognitive approaches that increase cognitive flexibility can also increase both self-efficacy and the capacity to accept social support, both of which are associated with greater tolerance of pain and reduction in perceived pain intensity (Ferreira-Valente et al., 2009).

Mindfulness and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Mindfulness is classically defined as being present in the moment, on purpose and without judgement. With this definition, we can think of mindfulness as intentional present-moment acceptance plus non-judgement of pain. This sounds very much like what we have been discovering is helpful for coping with pain! Mindful approaches to pain have been explored in multiple forms, including one of the most well-known approaches for chronic pain, called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). MBSR was developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, an American Professor Emeritus of Medicine. He is the creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. Kabat-Zinn opened the clinic in the late 1970s to help people with chronic back pain, cancer patients, and others with chronic pain.

MBSR is an 8-week evidence-based program that offers secular, intensive mindfulness training to assist people with stress, anxiety, depression, and pain (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2013; Paulus, 2016). MBSR uses a combination of mindfulness meditation, yoga, and awareness of body sensations, as well as exploration of patterns of behavior, thinking, and emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2013). It is important to remember that mindfulness is not just stillness of the mind, but also includes acceptance and investigation of present experience, including body sensations, such as pain, in order to reduce suffering or distress and to increase well-being (Creswell, 2017). In MBSR, multiple strategies are combined to help improve awareness and attention to the present moment, reduce judgement and rumination, regulate emotions, and promote relaxation and stress management skills, all with the positive outcome of improved coping with pain (Gu et al., 2015).

Importantly, Dr. Kabat-Zinn reminds us that what he thinks is helping people, is not so much that their pain diminished, but that their relationship with pain changed (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2013). He proposes that through cultivation of awareness of bodily sensations moment to moment this helps people notice the changing nature of their sensations and helps people to not identify so much with the pain. In other words, people can be taught to see that 'they are not their pain' by experiencing the subtle changes in pain and understanding the impermanence of the sensations. These experiences then facilitate a different relationship with pain, in which the person is less attached to pain, and where the perception or severity of pain may even diminish.

There have been scores of books about MBSR and its usefulness and positive impact. For this reason, we will not review the full program of MBSR, and instead refer you to the excellent resources at the end of this chapter. We will, however, present some mindfulness strategies from Kim's work with patients living with lupus.

Around 2016–17, Kim and Morgan collaborated with others at the University of Virginia to design a contemplative intervention for people living with lupus. A year of research went into the design of this treatment, which is largely based on MBSR and other treatment approaches in this book, including gentle yoga, and interpersonal skills. We called the treatment, Contemplative-Based Intervention for Lupus or CBIL (pronounced like Sybil). This treatment was also provided to the support people of the lupus patients, in order to help the support system and not only the patient. We implemented CBIL to help lower stress, improve well-being, improve management of pain, and affect the biomarkers of lupus (Penberthy et al., 2018). Some strategies from this approach are provided below with the understanding that mindfulness is a key component of many effective interventions for pain.

Mindfulness Techniques for Being with and Caring for Our Pain or Fatigue

Understanding and Accepting the Inevitability of Negative Physical Sensations

Pain and fatigue are an inevitable part of our lives. While we cannot always influence or control the conditions, which cause pain or fatigue to arise, the good news is we do have some control and influence over how we react to the presence of these sensations in our bodies and stress in our minds. Most of the time when pain or fatigue arises we naturally and understandably have an unpleasant feeling of avoidance, dislike, or sorrow which may lead to additional psychological stress and negative thinking patterns. An ancient analogy of an arrow and pain can help us understand this process. When we experience some kind of bodily pain or feel fatigue, we can think of this as being hit by a first arrow. When we start to feel unpleasant feelings and psychological distress over being hit by the first arrow this is like being hit immediately by a second arrow. Mindfulness teaches us how to remove and even avoid being hit by the second arrow. How do we do this? By paying attention in a nonjudgmental way to the sensations of pain or fatigue itself, in other words being present for the pain and fatigue and accepting it as part of our present moment experience. This is step one – accepting and being with our pain and fatigue.

Caring for Our Negative Physical Sensations

The second step of working with our pain or fatigue is using mindfulness to generate a caring and compassionate attitude for ourselves and our pain or fatigue. Another analogy to help with understanding this process is to think of pain or fatigue like a crying baby. While at first when we hear a baby crying it may startle us and be unpleasant but the next instinct of the caretaker is to immediately embrace and comfort the baby. We can learn to treat our pain, fatigue, and suffering like a caretaker embracing a crying baby. Once we have recognized and accepted the presence of pain or fatigue, we can embrace it with mindful, gentle, and caring attention. We can use the power of mindful breathing to calm the body and mind and bring healing to the part of our body that is experiencing pain. This requires taking the time to stop and take care of the pain or fatigue in your body by practicing mindful breathing.

Wisdom of Change

The third step is to experience, remember, and understand that the pain and fatigue that we are experiencing in this moment will not last forever. It inevitably will change. Often our fear of future pain or fatigue makes our current situation much worse because we worry that the sensations will never go away. When we breathe in and out mindfully with our pain or fatigue, we have a chance to recognize that it is not an unchanging block, but something more fluid and very much responsive to our attitude toward it. Relaxing around the unpleasant, rather than tensing against it is much more effective in reducing and releasing it.

It is not an accident that these instructions are very similar to what I learned to do as a child with my severe migraine pain. I realize now, that I followed what worked for me and taught myself these mindfulness strategies as a young person. I know that doing so helped me get through the misery of chronic pain and helps inform my work with patients today.

Coping with negative experiences such pain and fatigue alone is not enough to live a good life. Imagine, just getting through the day by eliminating negatives but not having any positives! We must also have some pleasant or at least neutral sensations to help make it all worthwhile.

Thus, in CBIL, we also focus on recognizing and growing the pleasant sensations and feelings.

Mindfulness Techniques for Recognizing Pleasant and Neutral Feelings

Pleasant Feelings and Experiences

The human brain has evolved with a negativity bias, which means we just pay more attention to things like pain and unpleasant experiences than we do to pleasant experiences. We seem to be wired to notice bad news and need to learn how to practice to see and savor the good news (Bebbington et al., 2017). While we know that pain and unpleasant experiences are an inherent part of our lives, at the same time, our lives are full of pleasant and joyful experiences that only become enhanced when we pay attention to them fully and understand them better. When we can be mindful and aware of a pleasant feeling, we can simply enjoy it for what it is in this moment. We don't need to worry about how to make it last or plan for it in the future; we just simply enjoy the fullness of our present moment experience. When we are mindful, we are aware that a pleasant feeling just like an unpleasant feeling is also subject to change so when it passes, we can be in a place of ease.

Neutral Feelings and Experiences

Mindfulness can also teach us to transform neutral feelings into joyful positive feelings. Most of our experience is neutral. When we are not aware that we experience a neutral feeling, we tend to check-out, running on automatic pilot, either feeling boredom or somewhat distant from our own experience. When we are not mindful of neutral feelings, they easily and quickly become unpleasant feelings. Think of a time when you were feeling neutral, nothing wrong in that moment, and nothing particularly joyful either. Often boredom will set in and we begin to feel a subtle, background dissatisfaction with our experience, which can easily snowball into a stronger, more pronounced unpleasant feeling of loneliness, craving, judgment, or sadness. If we are mindful of a neutral feeling, we have the opportunity to 'upgrade' it to a pleasant feeling. When we are feeling neutral it means nothing is wrong! Happiness of a nontoothache or a moment when we are not in pain. With mindfulness, we learn to see there are so many things going well in any given moment. Our heart is still beating, we can still breathe in and out, and we have air to breathe and water to drink. We have food, shelter, and clothes. In this way we transform a moment in which we are taking things for granted into a moment of gratitude and well-being.

Behavioral Strategies

Even with the use of cognitive and mindfulness-based approaches for pain, behavioral strategies are a necessary tool. These tools involve things like self-care components such as relaxation and behavioral pacing. Relaxation strategies for pain may include a structured progressive muscle relaxation approach to help induce the relaxation response. The term 'Relaxation Response' was coined by Dr. Herbert Benson, who founded Harvard's Mind/Body Medical Institute (Benson & Klipper, 1975). He defines the relaxation response as the ability to encourage your body to release chemicals and brain signals that make your muscles and organs slow down and increase blood flow to the brain. In his book, *The Relaxation Response*, Dr. Benson describes the scientific benefits of relaxation, explaining that regular practice of the relaxation response can be an effective treatment for a wide range of stress-related disorders. The relaxation response is essentially the opposite reaction to the 'fight or flight' response and counteracts the physiological effects of stress and the fight or flight response. Many think of it as similar to the relaxation induced in a mindfulness practice. Intentionally relaxing the body is part of most psychotherapeutic approaches to pain management, including various forms of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT, ACT) and mindfulness-based interventions. A typical script for eliciting the relaxation response is provided below.

Steps to Elicit the Relaxation Response

1 Sit quietly in a comfortable position or you can be in a reclined position
2 Close your eyes
3 Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed. This may take some time, since you want to thoroughly relax each set of muscles, but not all at one time
4 You can also first tense and then relax the muscles in order to become more aware of the tension and then the release of the muscle. Often, when we are tense or in pain, we are not always aware of the extent of our muscle tension. Intentionally tensing the muscles can increase this awareness and promote more thorough release and relaxation of the muscle
5 Breathe through your nose. As you finish relaxing all of your muscles, become aware of your breathing. As you breathe you can focus on your breath and be still. Breathe easily and naturally
6 Continue for 10 to 20 minutes or until you feel sufficiently relaxed. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes

7. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace
8. With practice, the response should come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with the elicitation of the Relaxation Response (Benson et al., 1975)

Behavioral Pacing

There are different ways to approach behavioral pacing, but all involve being aware of and monitoring behavior relative to pain and functioning. Activity pacing is a central concept underlying chronic pain theory and treatment. Pacing traditionally has been grouped in two domains: (1) slowing down or moving slowly and (2) breaking up activities into smaller pieces. The idea is that by using these behavioral strategies, the person suffering with pain can still do things, and not become overwhelmed emotionally, cognitively, or physically. This should then help the patient not add burden to the tasks and thus experience less pain interference (Nielson et al., 2013).

Another way to think about pacing is to intentionally schedule your day or activities around your energy level, pain intensity, or depression and anxiety symptoms. What this means, is that you think about and track when you have more or less pain, for instance, and then schedule accordingly. If you know you have less pain around 10 in the morning, that may be the time to do some house cleaning or exercise. If you have worse pain in the late afternoon, that may be a time to schedule activities that are more sedentary, like reading emails or reading or resting. This way you can still do things and feel productive while also honoring your own body and its rhythms.

A contemporary twist on this idea of pacing has been presented by Christine Miserandino who wrote about her experiences having to pace herself due to living with lupus (Miserandino, 2003). She was looking for some way to explain the reduced amount of mental and physical energy that she had available for activities of living due to her chronic illness and pain. Reportedly, she was with a friend at a restaurant when this idea occurred to her, so she used spoons as a unit of measure in order to quantify how much energy a person has throughout a given day. Each activity we do requires a given number of spoons, which are replaced when we ‘recharge’ through rest or some other restorative practice. A person who runs out of spoons has no choice but to rest until their spoons are replenished. People with no pain may wake up with more spoons and use less spoons during the day than people with pain, fatigue, or illness. Additionally, people with pain may need to use more spoons to do something that would take far fewer spoons for someone not in pain. The idea is that people with fewer spoons have to think and plan more regarding their spoon usage than people who have more spoons because they do not suffer from chronic pain or fatigue. We have to remember that each of us have unique individual limits on what we can do each day and in each situation. The spoon theory can help us remember this and be aware and also gentle with ourselves.

Each of us can think about how many spoons we have every morning. This is similar to the mindful awareness component found in most mindful and cognitive approaches to pain. Then we can think about what our priorities are for the day, and these can be the things we spend our energy or spoons on first. With limited spoons, we must always be aware of how many we have and what we need to spend them on. This can help promote value-based goal setting by encouraging us to prioritize goals that are meaningful to us. The spoon theory can also help us remember that it is really not adaptive or relevant to compare ourselves to others, since we do not know how many spoons they may have.

Using the spoon theory metaphor also allows you the opportunity to imagine and think about what activities, people, or situations help increase your energy level or add spoons to your day. You can use this information to mindfully engage throughout the day in ways that help you add spoons. Secondary negative emotions such as feeling frustrated or angry due to the limits of pain and fatigue are side-stepped because the focus is on utilizing the spoons that are available for goals that are valued and comparisons to others is less relevant. Pain is not eliminated, but it is managed by recognizing and honoring the limits it imposes.

Ricky's Follow-Up

I continued to work with Ricky over several months with a focus on reducing catastrophizing thoughts, working toward value-based goals, and pacing his behavior. He loved the story of the spoon theory and shared it with his family to help them better understand the impact of his pain on what he could and could not do. It also helped him not beat up on himself so much and this reduced some of his negative emotions. We introduced the relaxation response and strategies he could use to help relax his body on purpose and he tried these with limited success. Looking back, I think the most impactful change for Ricky and the thing that most improved his quality of life was the change in his anger and frustration. With more compassion for himself and others, he found life to be more comfortable and enjoyable. He recognized that he could live a good life even with his pain.

What You Can Do Now

Effective Communication When in Pain

Negative physical sensations can negatively impact how you communicate with other people. It is important to know when this is happening and be mindful in your responses. Below are some steps to help you communicate effectively.

1. First become aware of your unpleasant physical sensation such as stress, pain, or fatigue in a mindful way. Do not ignore it and do not magnify it. Name it
2. Stop, take a deep breath, observe yourself, then proceed. Once you accept and own your pain or fatigue you can think about how you want to interact with others. Think about how many spoons you have. Are you running low?
3. If you need to interact, be mindful that you may come across more negatively than you intend to. People in pain are often perceived as more interpersonally hostile or aggressive, even when they do not mean to be
4. Set a goal of what you want to achieve in your interpersonal interaction and MAKE SURE THAT IT IS REALISTIC AND ATTAINABLE. That means you have to have enough spoons to achieve your goal. Your goal CANNOT be to make someone else feel, think or do something or to change something that you have no control over
5. Think of a few phrases that you can use to express yourself effectively even when you are in pain, feeling fatigued, or extremely depressed or stressed. Remember that messages to others are often best received when they are perceived as friendlier. If you have a request for another, it is best to be more assertive in asking, since others cannot read your mind. Think about where you want to be on the interpersonal circle when you interact with others
6. It is useful to use the connector word 'AND' instead of 'BUT,' especially when both parts of the thought or sentence are true. Some examples include:

   - 'I want to listen and yet I am in such pain it is hard to hear'
   - 'I am fatigued from frustration and yet know that you are trying to help me'
   - 'I know you are on my side and sometimes it feels like I am alone'

7. If needed, use additional phrases to convey your feelings or support:

   - 'I am here for you'
     This might be helpful for someone you love to say to you, but this can also be about you saying this to yourself to show

self-compassion and being present for whatever arises in the body. These phrases are also generic and can be adapted to your own language. For instance, you may feel more authentic saying 'Hey if you need anything just let me know I am here for you.'

- 'I know you are there and I am happy/I appreciate it'
  This is about you being present and recognizing and appreciating the other people in your life and the happiness associated with them.
- 'I know that you suffer and that is why I am here for you'
  This again is a helpful thing to ask the people in your life to say to you when you are suffering. You can also say this to yourself in a compassionate manner. Understanding suffering is the foundation for support and love.
- 'I suffer, and I want you to know, please help'
  This is an important phrase to use to help others understand your pain. Interpersonally, this is coming from a more assertive or friendly-assertive place on the interpersonal circle and engages others in asking for help and support directly.

Exercises to Set Boundaries

How Big Is Your Pie and Who Is Eating it All Up?

This exercise helps us take into account all that is going on in our lives and how our store of energy/abilities has limits when we are overtaxed, and how we can recognize and honor these limits while still being productive and engaged. This can be used for yourself or you can help someone else in your life by going through this exercise with them.

1. Sit (or stand) anywhere comfortable with a pen and paper. Draw out a pie – this can be a simple circle like that in a pie chart or it can have a fun crust
2. Envision and label this pie as your time and energy at this time in your life. This includes time and energy used for work, family, friends, and pleasure – but you can also include specifics if you've been dedicating time and energy to a specific task, person, or project. Next, divide your pie into sections, indicating where your time and energy is going – for example, if you have a big work project you've been using much of your time and energy toward completing, you might section off a large portion of your pie to work. Or, if you have a family matter that you've been dedicating time and energy to, you may have a large portion of your pie currently dedicated to family. Try to be as realistic as you can when you're sectioning your

pie – for example, while you may want to be dedicating your evenings to writing a book, you may find yourself working overtime at your day job (speaking from personal experience here, if you can't tell…)

3. After taking a look at your pie, try to think of ways you can more evenly split your pie. Maybe you can carve out Wednesday mornings to work on your book or talk with your supervisor about limiting overtime work. Maybe you can schedule a phone call with a family member once a week to check in with them. Anything realistic that you can do to 'more evenly cut' your pie will be helpful to think over. You may consider laying out boundaries if there are certain people who may be 'eating up' some of your pie via negative interactions or meetings that cut into your other tasks or goals. You can consider chatting with a loved one to help generate some ideas, too
4. Come back to your pie after about a week after drawing it up and see if there's any slice that you feel has gotten bigger or smaller. If you do notice a difference, try finding some solutions (like those mentioned in this chapter!) to see how you can continue evenly slicing your pie

Feeling Safe with Pain – Mountain Pose

We've all experienced pain – physical, emotional, and even spiritual. Many of us may want to ignore our pain or pretend it isn't there, while some of us may be tempted to 'push through' the pain without acknowledging it or its roots. While these methods may get us through our pain in the short term, they'll likely not solve all of our pain or help us with it in the long term. We may actually be setting ourselves up for more pain if we don't cope with it safely and appropriately! To cope with any kind of pain, we can follow the below steps:

1. Stand tall and steady, grounding through the feet. If standing causes too much pain, you may choose to sit or lay down, so long as your head and/or back is propped up enough to allow room for gentle alertness
2. Inhale and exhale three times deeply. As you breathe, you may notice areas of physical or mental pain. Perhaps you notice pressure in the forehead or tension in the foot. Maybe you identify painful emotions such as self-doubt or exhaustion
3. Imagine your energy rooting down into the ground like a tall, strong tree. Try to focus your breath toward any areas you feel pain, and imagine the tall, strong, grounding energy from the earth extending to those areas of pain. Like a friend offering a hug, imagine extending supporting, loving energy to the pain

4 Allow yourself to soften. Unfurrow the brow, soften the jaw, relax the eyes and mouth. You can be strong and grounded, gentle, and relaxed at the same time
5 Extend this softening, loving energy to all areas of the body. As you soften and relax, repeat this phrase to yourself silently: ‘I accept you, pain. I embrace you, pain. I befriend you, pain. I am filled with calming energy.’ Like a lingering houseguest, the pain may stay longer than anticipated – and, like a gracious host, you may allow it to remain for as long as it will
6 You may notice that the pain subsides or remains. Neither is good nor bad. Simply continue to extend that loving energy to the pain for as long as you need
7 Once you feel ready, bring gentle movement back to the body by wiggling your fingers and toes. Placing your hands over your heart, give yourself a moment of gratitude for befriending pain. You can come back to this practice any time you’d like to cope with any kind of pain or whenever you’d like to extend loving energy to yourself

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11 Feeling Happy? Maintaining Joy

Kim's Experience

I was sitting on a stand-up paddle board in the middle of the lake. My feet in the water, looking out over the still smoothness, I felt my body relax. The temperature of the air and water were perfect – warm, but not too hot. It was late afternoon on a Saturday and the sun was at a low angle with long shadows across the lake. It was quiet except for a few bird calls and the occasional 'bloop' sound of a jumping fish. There was a slight breeze and a smell of fresh cut grass which always reminds me of summer. I looked around me, seeing my husband standing further away on his paddle board in the middle of the lake. I paused, took a few deep breaths and was filled with gratitude. I was so comfortable physically. I felt safe and pleasant emotionally. I felt connected to this man on the lake with me, and realized how joyous this moment was. I had a profound sense of well-being. I was what many people would call 'happy.' Nothing big or exciting had happened. We had not won the lottery, or celebrated an anniversary. It was not anybody's birthday. It was just a quiet Saturday. Why did I suddenly feel the overwhelming sensation of happiness and well-being? What was this experience and how did it happen?

Happiness and Subjective Well-Being

What is happiness? It has been described by a well-known happiness researcher, Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007) of the University of California, Riverside, as 'the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.' Many psychologists and researchers use the term subjective or psychological well-being or flourishing instead of happiness. Psychological well-being includes a person's overall appraisal of his or her life and affective or emotional state, and it is considered a key aspect of the health of individuals and groups. The field of happiness research, including Positive Psychology, has grown substantially since the late 20th century, producing dozens of books and articles about the benefits of happiness and strategies to achieve and maintain it. Happiness is a hot topic, and well it should be.

What Is the Big Deal about Being Happy?

Happiness makes us feel good, but that is not the extent of the positive aspects associated with happiness. There has been extensive research on the benefits of happiness including on how happiness is good for our health. It helps protect your heart health (Bhattacharyya et al., 2008), strengthen your immune system (Cohen et al., 2003), decrease, susceptibility to stress, disease, and pain (Howell et al., 2007), and is even correlated with living longer (Danner et al., 2001)! If that wasn't enough, happiness is associated with making higher incomes and higher quality of work (Becchetti et al., 2011), having more satisfying and longer marriages, more friends, stronger social support, and richer social interactions (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), and being more generous with others (Birnbaum & Friedman, 2014). Happy people have been shown to be better able to cope with stress and trauma and more creative (Fredrickson & Tugade, 2004). It seems obvious that happiness is good not only for individuals, but families, communities, and all of society!

Who Is Happy?

Part of the conundrum of happiness is that what we think might obviously make us happy, sometimes doesn't. Wealthy, famous people who seemingly have everything, report feeling unhappy and depressed. Successful, competitive people who have achieved beyond their dreams, are miserable and only thinking of what more they want. Happiness is subjective and thus, can be extremely difficult to quantify. Based on the data, it's clear that things like money or fame are only part of the happiness equation (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). So, what does seem to be correlated with happiness? Who is happy?

The World Happiness Report is a well-known source of cross-country data and research on self-reported life satisfaction or happiness (Helliwell et al., 2019). It is based on survey data from the Gallup World Poll, which is a set of nationally representative surveys undertaken in more than 160 countries in over 140 languages (APA, 2006–2008). Measuring happiness is tricky due to the slippery nature of the concept. However, research does support that surveys asking people about life satisfaction and happiness do measure subjective well-being with reasonable accuracy (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). Some of the overall trends of this research do, indeed, support that richer and healthier countries tend to have higher average happiness levels. Across time, most countries that have experienced sustained economic growth have seen increasing happiness levels. Although the evidence suggests that income and life satisfaction tend to go together, this does not necessarily mean they are one and the same. There is a caveat to this finding. Those with such little money that they cannot live safely or comfortably do not endorse increased happiness levels. It is typically only after you have enough money to comfortably survive that you can endorse happiness. Having more money above and beyond that, however, seldom significantly improves happiness. The report highlighted six additional significant factors overall that contributed to happiness: social support, life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and corruption levels (Helliwell et al., 2019). Furthermore, they report that the overall average happiness in the world is actually increasing. In fact, research has found that we typically underestimate the average happiness of people around us (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020).

The research also demonstrates that older people seem to endorse more happiness and well-being than younger people. A 2010 study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science found a U-shaped relationship between happiness and age in adults, with increasing happiness after age 50 into the 70s and 80s, and least happiness endorsed in middle age people (Stone, Schwartz, Broderick, & Deaton, 2010). Another study by Dr. Yang Yang at the University of Chicago found that happiness increased from age 65 to 85 and beyond, in both sexes (Yang, 2008). This is great news for most of us! This means if we are south of 50 years old, odds are in our favor that our happiness will only increase! Dr. Laura Carstensen, a Stanford University social psychologist, calls this the well-being paradox, pointing out that although older adults face issues such as aging bodies and brains, and experience more cumulative loss and illness, they also have more social and emotional experiences and learning that comes with those experiences (Carstensen, 2011). Carstensen credits this response to something called 'socioemotional selectivity theory,' which is a focus on positive emotional goals in later life. She proposes that with age comes positive psychosocial traits, such as self-integration and self-esteem, and that these signs of maturity could contribute to a better sense of overall well-being (Carstensen, 2011). In my own advancing years, I have recognized that I focus more energy on things that are rewarding to me. I am less likely to endure unpleasant and meaningless situations or interactions and feel that I know myself better than I ever have in my life. Perhaps these qualities helped me achieve happiness on that Saturday afternoon.

How Do I Pursue Happiness?

We can't all wait until we get old or rich to be happy. So how do I increase my happiness now? If we think about the things that are associated with happiness and then focus on those that we can control (we cannot control if we are not yet our wise 80-year-old-self), it leaves us with a nice list of potential things we can do to help improve our happiness levels. Positive psychologist and University of Pennsylvania researcher, Dr. Martin Seligman has conducted extensive research on how to achieve happiness and found that most satisfied, upbeat people were those who had discovered and exploited their unique combination of 'signature strengths' (those character strengths that are most essential to who we are) to help move through the dimensions of happiness described below. There are tools, such as the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), formerly known as the 'Values in Action Inventory,' that are designed to identify character strengths if you are having trouble identifying your own (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Strengths are similar to values and include such things as curiosity, bravery, perseverance, hope, humility, and fairness.

In his research, Dr. Seligman describes three dimensions of happiness that build upon each other: the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life (Seligman, 2011: Goodman et al., 2018). The Pleasant Life is based on pleasure and is associated with savoring things like our relationships, the natural environment, and our senses. To increase happiness using this dimension, you can do things like snuggle with someone you love, take a long bath, eat a yummy meal, take a walk in nature, or even paddleboard on a lake with your husband!

The next dimension is called the Good Life and is achieved through discovering your unique strengths and employing them creatively. The behaviors to increase happiness in this dimension may include developing a talent or skill, such as playing music or sports. It may also look like creating something such as a piece of art or helping others through volunteering or tutoring. These behaviors usually involve active engagement and exploring your own values and strengths and then sharing with others. This might include learning to paddleboard well or teaching others about it, then forming a club that meets regularly to share a morning on the water.

The final dimension is the Meaningful Life, where the idea is to take your own unique strengths, values, and skills and use them for an even greater purpose. Happiness in this dimension may involve being generous with others, demonstrating gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, and kindness toward others, or practicing your religion or spiritual rituals for a greater purpose. This may include starting a foundation, volunteering, or sharing your strengths and skills with others in a significant and meaningful way for the greater good.

Dr. Seligman uses the acronym PERMA to summarize what he has found with respect to happiness. He states that humans seem happiest when they have Pleasure or positive emotions, Engagement (being completely absorbed by activities, like a flow state), Relationships, Meaning (belonging to something bigger), and Accomplishments (having realized tangible goals) (Seligman, 2011).

As you can see from the information about what fosters happiness, we have spoken of several of these in previous chapters, including practicing mindfulness (Chapters 1, 2, and 8), building self-efficacy (Chapter 3), being proactive (Chapters 6 and 7), establishing and nourishing healthy interpersonal relationships and being kind (Chapters 4 and 5), and cultivating compassion and forgiveness for others and yourself (Chapters 8 and 9). These practices will go a long way to help facilitate your happiness! Use them, not only to address the issue in the previous chapters but also to help increase happiness in your life!

Living Your Values

The pursuit of happiness is aided tremendously by knowing your own personal values and allowing them to guide you. Values are your desires for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are not about what you want to get or achieve; but are about how you want to act on an ongoing basis. Personal values are not always discussed, but are the things that are important to you. You might think of values as your own personal mission statement – what you stand for or are about. You may have several values, and they may be different depending on the area of your life or season of your life. As an older person, I may value dependability in others more than I did as a young person, when I valued adventure or spontaneity. Think about what your values are in different areas of your life such as work or school, relationships, spiritual life, or health. Think about what you value now and what you used to value. Are they the same? See if you can generate your values now. Remember, values can change depending on the area of life you are thinking about and they can change over time. There are hundreds of different values, and there are no right or wrong values.

My husband and I had similar values of stability and service while raising Morgan. We wanted to provide a stable, loving home for Morgan and to demonstrate service to others as an important part of a good life. We also valued humor and this was an important component of keeping us happy and light-hearted. These values drive our actions while we were a young family and helped facilitate our happiness when we were intentional in living them. For example, we valued stability and so worked hard to stay in one geographic location which afforded Morgan the opportunity to have long-term friends and attend the same school from grade school to high school. Now, at age 24, Morgan has her own values that help her live a good life.

Morgan's Values

As mentioned, my parents raised me to understand the importance of serving others, working diligently, and finding the humor and lightness in all situations. These are still values that I hold near to my heart, all of which I try to practice every day by being kind to others, finding ways to serve my community through volunteer work and studying psychology (and, hopefully, in the future obtaining my Ph.D. in psychology and J.D. to serve those who have experienced sexual violence). I also deeply value gratitude, advocacy, and deep reflection, and I practice these each day through regular meditation, yoga practice, and engaging with my community. I practice a gratitude meditation/prayer every evening and have learned the importance of replacing 'I'm sorry' with 'thank you.' Living in Washington, D.C., I have ample opportunities to advocate with and for others for equal pay, housing, opportunity, and treatment – but the truth is, with advocacy as one of my deep values, I'd find opportunities for advocacy no matter where I live! And, naturally, as humor and silliness are one of the values I was raised with, I'm not afraid to let my freak flag fly. Singing and dancing in public, making funny faces, and cracking (mostly lame) jokes are some of my favorite and regular activities. I also find that it's easier to let go of the small stuff when I approach a mistake or minor inconvenience with laughter and lightness – often, a problem that appears to be overwhelming or feels like the last straw will automatically lose its grip if it is met with laughter. Once the issue feels lighter and more manageable, I'm able to find that I can accept it, resolve it, and move on much more efficiently – plus, this way, the 'problem' has little to no effect on my overall day! These values help me to live my life in alignment with what I care about and help me find meaning every day.

You can easily find lists of values online to help jog your thoughts about values. Some include honesty, kindness, diligence, respect, compassion, frugality, industriousness, patience, and faithfulness. You can also think about your values in the form of a mission statement as we discussed in Chapter 6. As the famous Russian-American writer and philosopher, Ayn Rand (1963, p. 123) wrote, 'Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one's values.'

Cultivating Positive Emotions and Gratitude

Positive emotions, like all emotions, are temporary and this can create a longing for the positive feelings to not end. This is called the hedonic treadmill. It is the idea of constantly trying to find new ways to experience positivity because old ways no longer work. There is a model developed by Dr. Barbara Frederickson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, called the Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotions. This theory suggests that building up positive emotions broadens a person's momentary thought–action repertoire. An example would be cultivating the positive emotion of joy which may encourage the urge to play, and then play builds other experiences like connecting with others and 'broadens' our mindset as well as opportunities. The broadened mindsets arising from these positive emotions are contrasted to narrowed mindsets associated with negative emotions. Increasing positive emotions and the behaviors they engender help promote the discovery of new and creative behaviors, ideas, and connections that in turn build personal resources (Frederickson, 2001).

Meditation is a way that you can experience the positive emotions needed to build personal resources. A specific kind of gratitude meditation is called a metta or loving-kindness meditation. The word metta is derived from the Pali language, the language in which Buddhist scriptures were composed, and means something akin to loving-kindness. This practice has been demonstrated to promote gratitude as well as many other positive outcomes such as happiness and compassionate love, reductions in avoidance and revenge, and reductions on the depression, anxiety, and stress subscales (Hofmann et al., 2011; Alba, 2013; Jayasinghe, 2017). Loving-kindness meditation has been shown to increase additional positive emotions of love, joy, contentment, hope, pride, interest, amusement, and awe (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Research has even demonstrated that loving-kindness meditation can lengthen telomeres, a marker of longevity (Hoge et al., 2013).

The practice of metta involves holding in mind a particular person (or being) and repeatedly wishing for them to be well and happy (or some version of that). It also involves wishing well for yourself. Loving-kindness meditation is a method of developing unconditional compassion for yourself and others. It is a meditation of care, concern, tenderness, friendship, and warmth for oneself and others. The practice comes from a place of selflessness, not obligation; and therefore, necessitates an open mind and open heart to practice. This practice might be an emotional practice for some, so remember to be kind to yourself. The details of the technique can differ, but often begin with directing a loving wish toward oneself, and moving progressively a person you like, such as a good friend, then a neutral person, then a person you are not fond of, and then to all beings. There are varieties of this theme, but all metta meditations focus on wishing the self and others well. Metta meditation was taught by the Buddha over 2600 years ago and is still practiced in many traditional Buddhist communities to this day, just as he taught it. A version of a metta meditation is provided in the exercises section of this chapter. You may use the phrases provided or choose your own.

Some examples of how this entire process may work to broaden-and-build a good life are provided in Table 11.1. The idea here is that knowing your values and goals helps you to better understand what emotions may be needed to achieve those values and goals. You can then engage in practices that help facilitate the emotions needed to realize your values and goals.

Gratitude, or the quality of being thankful, and can be practiced in other ways as well as the metta meditation. Two psychologists in particular, Dr. Robert A. Emmons of the University of California, Davis, and

Table 11.1 Value-Driven Goal Setting and Implementation Based on Broaden-and-Build: Two Examples

Practice >	*Emotion* >	*Value* >	*Goal*
Loving-kindness	Gratitude	Kindness	Self-care
Centering Breath	Calmness	Stability	Relationships

Dr. Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami, have conducted much of the current research in gratitude. They, along with researcher Dr. Martin Seligman, have demonstrated over and over the power of gratitude in promoting happiness and other positive outcomes such as healthy, positive relationships, prosocial behaviors, and improved health outcomes (Wood et al., 2010; Rusk et al., 2016; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Ma et al., 2017; Lavelock et al., 2016).

The most wonderful thing about gratitude is that it brings so many positive things into your life, and it is fairly straightforward to practice. Anyone can practice gratitude. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. Gratitude is an active, dynamic way to promote your own well-being and honor the well-being of others. Simply saying an intentional and heart-felt thank you to someone is an act of gratitude. When people ask me what they can do to be happy, I always make sure to include a gratitude exercise of some kind. Practicing gratitude is a form of giving thanks and is very effective at creating positive emotions. Writing a thank you note, saying thank you, or giving a gift of thanks is an act of gratitude and can increase your happiness level. Keeping a gratitude journal has been demonstrated to increase gratitude and promote happiness (Davis et al., 2016). You can also send a prayer of thanks to another person, God, the universe, or anyone or anything you wish. I often thank the universe for its daily gifts. You can say a prayer of thanks at the start of the day or end of the day. You can count your blessings by sharing them over a meal or writing them down.

Kim's Happiness Revisited

As I grow older, I notice that I am intentionally happier. What I mean is that I am more aware now of the joys in life and how in many ways, they are sweeter having known heartache, pain, and loss. I am content. A Saturday on the lake is very satisfying in part because I remember all the Saturdays that I was working 12 hours, or in the hospital with a family member watching them struggle. These are experiences that I did not have in my youth. Only with the gift of age, do I have these comparisons to make. That Saturday afternoon, I made a commitment to myself to try and stay in the moment, good or bad – to be aware of the situation with mindfulness and to remember to feel things all the way through.

What this means to me is to feel the negative emotions when they happen, and celebrate when positive emotions happen. I recalled the old saying 'this too shall pass' and how even in times of joy and love, it is important to relish it and know it will come and it will go.

I have also come to realize that my greatest sense of well-being and happiness comes in moments of gratitude. Sometimes the gratitude comes to me on its own, full of peace and light, landing in my heart and filling me up. Sometimes I have to work for the gratitude. I have to pause, focus, open up my heart to it, and actively invite it in. Whatever the method, I have found that receiving this gratitude into my heart, being with it and letting it engulf me, surround me and fill me up, is my path to sustained well-being.

Exercise to Bring Compassion into Daily Life

Loving-Kindness (Metta) Meditation

Introduces readers to metta (loving-kindness) meditation and includes tips on how to bring this compassion into daily life.

I find that one of the most abundant ways to practice gratitude is via the practice of loving-kindness. Loving-kindness, also translated to *maitrī* in Sanskrit or *mettā* in Pali, can be understood as loving others and yourself, even when (or, perhaps, particularly when) it is difficult. As Pema Chodron states, 'We are a poignant mixture of something that isn't all that beautiful and yet is dearly loved…We stay with ourselves and others when we're screaming for food and have no features and also when we are more grown up and more cute by worldly standards' (Chodron, 2001). Keeping this is mind, here are a few steps we can take to actively cultivate loving-kindness:

1 Find a quiet, calm space where you are. You can sit on cushions or a chair, lay down on your back, or find any comfortable position where you are alert yet relaxed. Take three deep breaths, connecting with your body as you breathe
2 Begin to close or lower your eyes and bring your awareness to your breath
3 As you notice your breath, take note of any sensations in the body, gently bring your awareness to your heart center. Try to see if there's anything there – any tingling, any warmth, for example
4 As you focus on your heart center, bring to mind a being that feels easy for you to love – for which joy comes up naturally. This can be a friend, family member, or even a pet. As you hold an image of that being in your mind, extend from your heart center appreciation and love to that being
5 Next, bring your mind to someone with whom you may have positive interactions – maybe a co-worker or kind acquaintance. Extend that same love to them

6 Gently begin to think of someone with whom you have more challenging interactions. This being may bring up frustration or exhaustion or anger. As you hold their image in your mind, extend the same love and appreciation extended to the other two beings to this individual. Soften your face, soften your heart – allow the love to flow to them
7 Finally, redirect the stream of loving-kindness – of joy, gratitude, and warmth – to yourself. Soften your own barriers. Realize that you aren't perfect, and that not all moments will feel easy or comfortable or happy. Extend love to yourself anyway. You deserve it
8 Take as much time and as many breaths as you need during this meditation. Depending on your time and your emotional experience, this meditation may take a few minutes or longer, if you have the time to focus and get a bit deeper. Either way, you can always use this meditation as a tool during challenging times and in daily life

Exercise to Cultivate Gratitude and Joy

The Butterfly Effect

This is one of my absolute favorite ways to cultivate gratitude and joy. Most of us have heard of The Butterfly Effect – the idea that one small act can affect everything, like the flap of a butterfly's wings ultimately creating a tornado (Dizikes, 2011). This idea is, to me, an incredibly important one because it reminds us of the lasting impact of even our tiniest actions – both negative and positive. To really see this play out in your life, I encourage you to do the following and see what happens:

1 When you wake up in the morning, take a minute or two to just listen to your breath before doing anything else. Lay in bed with your hand over your heart and just notice your breath. As you lay there, set an intention for the day – this can be an intention to be kind and respectful, to practice self-care, to accomplish a task at work. My personal favorite intention is one of mindfulness and gratitude to myself and everyone with whom I come into contact
2 Go about your day with this intention in mind. Bring your awareness back to it whenever you have just one breath. Take special note of your interactions with yourself and others. Pay attention to how you speak to yourself – instead of criticizing yourself, try encouraging yourself with a gentle tone. Also gently notice how you interact with other people – whether in a virtual work call or at the family dinner table. If you keep your intention in mind, you may find that you have an easier time deescalating challenging situations or simply noticing the beauty in everyday experiences. If you offer someone love and appreciation and positivity, you may get all of those things back in one way or another

Practice Gratitude

Goal: To Enhance the Positive Emotion of Gratitude

Technique: Each day, for at least 1 week, write down three things that you are grateful for.

Give the event a title
Describe in as much detail as possible
Write down how you felt
Write down what made it happen

Evidence: In a research study, visitors to a website received instructions for performing this exercise. Writing about three good things was associated with increased happiness immediately afterward, as well as 1 week, 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months later (Seligman et al., 2005).

Suggestions for use: use this daily. This can be used in a group as well. Can select 1 day out of the week to write or say what you are grateful for in your work. Keep a notebook by your bed, or on the kitchen table to maintain your practice.

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12 So Long for Now?

Kim's Story

People have asked me if I was afraid to die when I delivered Morgan so prematurely. They wonder how I stayed so calm when I knew that I was at such a high risk of something fatal happening to me such as sudden hemorrhaging, total organ failure, or death by eclampsia – or something happening to Morgan, which was highly likely. I am not 100% sure how to answer these questions, and gratefully, the frequency of being asked has declined over time. What I remember in that time immediate to the emergency C-section was indeed a calmness. It was a peace that came, I think, from a deep sense of feeling OK with myself and the life I had lived up to that moment. I remember looking at my husband and being so desperately in love with him and thrilled that I had him in my life. I remember feeling the warm support of prayers and positive thoughts that were coming to me from relatives, friends, and colleagues. I remember feeling purpose and belonging, and a faith in my beliefs, and perhaps these are what allowed me to get through this frightening experience.

Fear of Death and Dying

I treat people who have serious illnesses, including life-threatening cancers, mental illnesses, and other conditions. Some of these patients know they are dying and handle it in the most beautiful way, with grace and compassion. They have what we call a 'good death.' Others, however, fight death, usually out of fear. I have rarely seen a person who was fearful of death have a good death. And of course, those left behind often suffer from grief related to the death of their loved one. This grief is only compounded if their loved one suffered from fear of death. In fact, witnessing a loved one's death can be associated with increased death anxiety (Cella & Tross, 1987).

The fear of death is also called 'thanatophobia' and is defined as the dread, apprehension, and fear of annihilation that comes with a physical awareness of the loss of existence, frequently indescribable by language or imagery (Abdel-Khalek, 2005; Carpenito-Moyet, 2008). Death anxiety is common across all demographics worldwide, especially among terminally ill patients approaching death. The prevalence is estimated to reach approximately 80% of advanced stage cancer patients (Cherny, Coyle, & Foley, 1994). Death anxiety levels vary across ethnicities, gender, and cultures. For example, some of the limited research shows that Japanese males have higher rates of death anxiety than Australian males (Schumaker, Barraclough, & Vagg, 1988). Additionally, researchers have found adolescent and older-age females to have higher levels of death anxiety than males (Gaillot, Schmeichel, & Baumeister, 2006). In Western cultures, the sick and elderly are often hidden from view which intensifies death anxiety because dying is perceived as an unusual phenomenon (Florian & Mikulincer, 1997). Similarly, Americans tend to deny death by avoiding societal reminders of disability, aging, and illness (Martz & Livneh, 2003).

Social scientists have hypothesized that death anxiety may be so prevalent because our human emotional memory combines with human higher-level cognitive structures and enables us to anticipate and predict death (Breitbart et al., 2018; Burke, Martens, & Faucher, 2010). This is presumably different from other creatures who may not be able to conceptualize and worry about their impending death. Researchers further propose that the belief that life is bound within a physical being can perpetuate the fear of death because there is no hope of further existence after the body dies and this is distressing to humans (van Lommel, van Wees, Meyers, & Elfferich, 2001). This human 'mortality salience,' or awareness of one's mortality, can bring about feelings of regret that may alter beliefs about yourself. As an example, I treated a 77-year-old retired salesman, Barry, who was dying from metastatic lung cancer and he told me that he cheated on his wife one time on a business trip. He wondered if he should tell her about it before he died. His one-night stand made him feel bad because the behavior was not in line with his beliefs about himself as a loving husband. He talked with me about his dilemma and we reviewed his life and all the good memories with his wife. We also explored his goals and what he wanted for the end of his life with respect to his marriage. Barry ultimately decided not to tell his wife that he cheated on her, and he died peacefully with his wife by his side.

Erik Erikson was a German-American psychologist who developed a theory on psychological development of human beings. He defined life as a developmental process with eight specific age-appropriate 'identity crises' that lead to self-actualization over the lifespan. He predicted that death awareness generates a crisis in midlife ('generativity' versus 'stagnation') and in older age ('ego-integrity' versus 'despair'). He proposed that these crises may come about due to the strain between the fact that as biological animals, we must eventually die and our own fantasies of immortality (Erikson, 1959). Studies have shown that the emotional strain of managing death thoughts does appear to hinder the human self-regulation process and actually intensifies death anxiety over time (Cella & Tross, 1987). Interestingly, having high self-esteem and endorsing feelings of cultural belonging and social acceptance can act as a buffer against death anxiety (Cherny et al., 1994; Cotter, 2003).

Coping with Death and Dying Anxiety

There is a body of research about strategies to help people overcome or cope with their fear of death and dying. Generally, the research in this domain focuses on strategies to reduce anxiety and fear via cultivating mindfulness or conducting a therapeutic approach to help the dying person make meaning of their life. Other strategies focus on more directly impacting death anxiety by facilitating an awareness that the personality of the individual may continue after the death of the body, or helping the person realize they are part of something larger than themselves. For instance, one study with terminally ill patients found low levels of death anxiety among those with a strong belief in an afterlife of reward (Smith, Nehemkis, & Charter, 1983–1984).

Terror Management Theory

The theoretical construct that informs many of the psychotherapeutic approaches to death anxiety is called terror management theory (TMT). TMT was originally proposed by social psychologists Drs. Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon, and Tom Pyszczynski (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) and is presented in their book, *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life* (2015). Their work continued the original work of Dr. Ernest Becker, an American cultural anthropologist and author of the 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*. TMT proposes that as intelligent creatures, humans are aware that their own death is unavoidable. Humans also have a self-preservation instinct that is in conflict with the idea of our inevitable and unpredictable death. This conflict produces terror or anxiety. This anxiety can be managed in two ways according to TMT: thought suppression and affirmation of meaning (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). In the short term, people may try to suppress death-related thoughts consciously, but this typically only wards off the anxiety temporarily without actually resolving it. Research does support that suppression attempts merely push death-related thoughts beyond conscious awareness, driving these thoughts to an unconscious level (Kashdan, Afram, Brown, Birnbeck, & Drvoshanov, 2011). The second approach involves embracing cultural beliefs, worldviews, or symbolic systems that act to counter the reality of death with more durable forms of meaning and value. This cultural worldview or belief system provides an explanation for existence and a set of values to guide our actions. Think of our religious beliefs and worldviews and how we utilize them to help us face death. TMT proposes that when we act in accordance with our cultural worldview values, this facilitates a sense of meaning for our lives, and allows us to imagine ourselves as part of something larger and immortal (Burke et al., 2010; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). These cultural values or beliefs help a person define what is meaningful to them and can be viewed as a foundation for self-esteem. In fact, TMT describes self-esteem as being the personal, subjective measure of how well an individual is living up to their own cultural values (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004; Solomon et al., 1991).

Meaning-Making

Using TMT as a basis, Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy (MCP) was designed to help people sustain or enhance a sense of meaning, peace, and purpose in their lives as they approach death (Frankl, 1984). MCP has been adapted for a palliative care population, with a focus on helping people increase meaning in their life. This is accomplished through structured exercises to help define and demonstrate sources of meaning including: experiential, creative, and attitudinal. The final session addresses meaning through courage and commitment, encouraging ideas of living one's legacy, and finding peace (Rosenfeld et al., 2017). Dr. William Breitbart and his colleagues (2018) developed Individual Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy (IMCP) based upon MCP. His research group at Memorial Sloan Kettering, a well-known cancer research center, compared IMCP to supportive therapy and treatment as usual. They determined that IMCP was the most effective treatment of the three for treating psychological and existential/spiritual distress in patients with advanced cancer. A basic premise of IMCP is that life has meaning and never ceases to have meaning. Thus, the patient is helped to find meaning in human existence and invited to choose their own attitude toward suffering and to choose how they respond to uncertainty. Sources of meaning can come from being creative, having experiences or relationships, our attitudes or history, as well as the legacy we leave behind. Again, we see ownership and intentionality as key components of self-efficacy and self-esteem, even when approaching the final chapters of our lives.

One of the first exercises of IMCP is a writing exercise called meaningful moments. The goal is to write down one or two experiences or moments when life has felt particularly meaningful to you. This can be any moment, and does not have to be a momentous event, although it certainly could be. For example, it could be floating on a paddle board on a Saturday afternoon, or it could be the birth of your child. The idea here is to help focus on meaning and increase identification with your own personal meaning-making about your life. Remembering your worth, your connections, and your meaning helps facilitate self-esteem and reduce anxiety (Breitbart et al., 2018).

Another method of psychotherapy is life review therapy (LRT), which is focused on helping people review their life and find meaning (Butler, 1963). LRT can lead to increased ego-integrity and is assumed to be associated with a decrease in death anxiety (Fishman, 1992). In a 2018 study, Kleijn et al. combined LRT and Memory Specific Training (LRT-MST) to create an intervention called, 'Dear Memories.' This exercise invites people to remember positive memories during different lifetime periods to increase ego-integrity which is the final stage of Erikson's developmental stages and the opposite of despair. Other interventions such as Managing Cancer and Living Meaningfully have a similar focus on exploring meaning in various areas of life, and have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing distress in dying patients as well as their loved ones (Lo et al., 2015).

Continuation and Connection

A belief that you are part of something larger than yourself can be a powerful component of meaning-making for humans. As we have discussed, this meaning-making can help build esteem and reduce death anxiety. These beliefs can be facilitated intentionally by cultural or religious belief systems and can also be influenced by events and experiences, such as mystic experiences, significant world events, or nearly dying. Out of body experiences (OBEs), where a person experiences the world from a location outside their physical body, are a common aspect of near-death experiences (NDEs) and have been shown to increase people's beliefs in a life after death which is often associated with decreased levels of death anxiety (Blanke, Landis, Spinelli, & Seeck, 2004; Bourdin, Barberia, Oliva, & Slater, 2017). A survey found that 63% of those who experienced an OBE said the experience increased their belief in an afterlife (Van Lommel et al., 2001). Researchers hypothesize that this change in belief is caused by the OBE providing evidence that one's consciousness can exist outside of the body. Surveys on NDEs and OBEs have demonstrated this reduction in death and dying anxiety in as many as 100% of surveyed individuals (Flynn & Kunkel, 1987). This astounding finding is reported to be due to the prominent belief in the presence of an afterlife that is elicited through the extraordinary experience. Four key elements of an NDE directly associated with the loss of death anxiety include: disembodiment or conscious thought while outside the body, positive emotional content, a spiritual encounter, and exposure to a bright otherworldly light (Tassell-Matamua, 2014).

Frequently, people who experience an NDE or OBE also experience conscious thought outside of the physical body. This phenomenon has been recounted during surgical procedures with cessation of brain activity, comatose and cyanotic states, resuscitation, and cardiac arrest. Patients are able to recall specific elements such as doctors, equipment, procedures, and sounds of these events from positions external to their body verified by their respective surgeons and records (Beauregard et al., 2012; Parnia et al., 2014; Van Lommel, 2013). The continuum of consciousness during temporary death or severe impairment may suggest the existence of a consciousness beyond permanent death and the physical body.

Positive emotions such as peace, serenity, bliss, and love have been intensely experienced by 80–100% of NDEs (Schwaninger et al., 2002). Effects of these emotions are unique because experiencers describe them to be of a 'profound nature, outside the realms of ordinary emotional experience' (Tassell-Matamua, 2014). Tiberi (1993) deems these positive effects to be 'extrasomatic' emotions in which emotional intensity is heightened due to the awareness of experiencing something extraordinary. The compelling nature of these emotions proposes that death or dying is a psychologically enriching experience outside of normal constructs.

Spiritual encounters occur in 50% of NDEs (Kelly, 2001; Sutherland, 1989). Those encountered are usually deceased relatives, loved ones, holy figures, or a spirit guide which is a figure the person who has had the NDE does not recognize but is intimately attached to (Tassell-Matamua, 2014). The presence of a bright light is symbolic of the transcendence to an afterlife. People who have a NDE describe this light as an all-encompassing, almighty entity that elicits feelings of unconditional love and comfort (Tassell-Matamua, 2014; von Haesler & Beauregard, 2013). Those feelings can be tied to the positive emotions previously mentioned. The light is commonly perceived as contact with a divine power that establishes universal order and allows for transformational change (Ring, 1984).

Interestingly, recent research has demonstrated that a simulated OBE can also positively impact fear of death (Bourdin et al., 2017). The idea of making meaning by being part of something ongoing or larger than oneself, and the profound positive emotions associated with this experience would appear to be a key component of reducing fear of death, regardless of how this is achieved.

Coping with Grief

Pain and anxiety come not only from fear of our own death but also with the death of those we love. Grief is an intense emotional and physical reaction to the death of a loved one and is characterized by deep sadness and yearning to be with that person again. The death of a loved one is believed to be the most powerful stressor in everyday life, often causing significant distress to all those closely connected to the person who died (Keyes et al., 2014). People who are grieving are at increased risk of serious mental health problems such as depression and substance abuse, and are at increased risk of suicide (Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001; Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007). Most people adapt over time to the loss of a loved one, but each person's grief is unique and the pain and recovery may take months to years, or may remain indefinitely. Coping with the loss of a close friend or family member may be one of the hardest challenges that many of us face. When we lose a spouse, sibling, or parent, the loss can be especially intense.

Even though we all understand that loss is a natural part of life, we still can be overcome by shock and confusion, leading to significant feelings of sadness or depression. Although the sadness typically improves as time passes, grieving is an important process in order to cope with these feelings. It is important to remember that there is no 'normal' time period for grieving, and that each person may grieve differently. How you grieve depends on many factors, including your personality and coping style, your life experiences, your faith or spirituality, and how significant the loss was to you.

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a psychiatrist and author of the internationally best-selling book, *On Death and Dying*, introduced what is known as the 'five stages of grief' (Kübler-Ross, 1969). These stages of grief were based on her studies of patients facing terminal illness, but they have been generalized to coping with the death of loved ones. In her model the five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally, acceptance. However, Dr. Kübler-Ross was clear in her writing that not everyone who grieves goes through all of these stages. In fact, you do not have to go through each stage in order to heal, and some people resolve their grief without going through any of these stages.

Many of the strategies we have presented in this book may be helpful in coping with loss. For example, approaching and accepting the negative feelings associated with mourning, and identifying a goal of self-care during the time of grieving and beyond is an important factor in coping with grief and coming to terms with loss. This literally means making the decision to intentionally feel your emotions, and take care of yourself and your family, including giving yourself permission to cry, laugh, sit quietly, rest, eat, recreate, and exercise. Talking about the death of your loved one is also an important way of approaching and accepting the death. You can talk with friends and colleagues in order to understand what happened and remember your friend or family member. Denying the death is not helpful and ultimately may make you feel worse.

Finally, relying on your own belief system and that of your loved one is important. This helps make meaning of life and facilitates the bereavement process and healing. If you have a way to conceptualize death and its relationship to life, this can help you make sense of things in a way that others in your community may understand. Religious rituals, family or cultural traditions for the dead, and other celebrations of life and death are important components of meaning-making. Remembering and celebrating the life of the person who died is also part of this meaning-making. When my mother, Marlene, died, we followed her instructions regarding her 'life celebration,' as she called it. We had an outdoor party in late May and invited children, elderly people – all her friends and family and celebrated her life with music, flowers, balloons, dogs, food, and each of us recounted our loving and happy memories with this remarkable woman. It was tremendously helpful for me in coping with my own grief to celebrate her life with others who loved her and to have a way of making meaning of her life and death.

Kim's Update

Since Morgan's birth I have had other times when my life was in danger due to my blood disorder. I have had times when I realistically thought I would die. I have had to make meaning out of what I face daily. I have also had significant experiences that have influenced my beliefs about life and death. One summer when I was in my 20s, I was at the Outer Banks of North Carolina on the beach with my mother. The Outer Banks is a group of barrier islands on the Atlantic Ocean and a popular destination in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. We were there together, just the two of us. I'm not sure why my father or my other siblings were not there, but it was just me and my mother. We both love the ocean and we spent some time laying on the sand getting warm and drowsy. My mother told me that she was going in to swim and I murmured a soft OK without opening my eyes. The sun was dazzling bright as I reclined on the sandy towel, so I covered my eyes with a towel. I might have drifted to sleep. I'm not sure. But I woke to a crowd of voices in the distance. It was not a loud sound, but noticeably louder than the typical hum of the beach. I rose to my elbows, and the towel slid off my face. I looked out to the ocean, and saw people gathered at the edge. My eyes were narrow, trying to protect from the dazzling sun. I could not see very well because it was so bright and I had no sunglasses on. Finally, my eyes adjusted a bit, and I saw a curious older gentleman dressed in baggy khaki pants with an old-fashioned hat on his head and white short-sleeve button-up shirt. He was helping my mother out of the water! He held her by the elbow, and they were walking together as she struggled to get out of the water. She had a lifeguard on the other side of her and I remember feeling curious and interested but not alarmed. I rose to a seated position and waited for her to approach. For some reason I did not get up and run to her. I was still in a bit of a daze and wondering if what I saw was real. I was certain that she was OK and a calm came over me. When she finally came up to the blanket where I was sitting, I asked if she was all right and she said yes and told me to lay back down. I laid down and she laid down beside me, breathing out slowly as she lowered herself. We both closed our eyes. After a few seconds I said curiously but calmly, 'Who was that man walking with you out of the ocean, the older one with a hat?' Without hesitation, she replied, 'That was my grandfather.'

We never really talked further about it, at least not that day. I did know that my mother spent a good deal of time with her grandparents and they essentially raised her due to her own parents' unfortunate circumstances. She was an only child and was especially close to her grandfather and my mother, Marlene, was apparently the apple of his eye. I learned much of this from her nursing school roommate and best friend, Linda, after Mom died. Mom and I never again spoke about that summer day at the beach. I assumed that her beloved grandfather had come back to save her because it was not her time, and it felt normal to me. I knew that I did not hallucinate him because my mother saw him too. Perhaps we had a mutual hallucination, I don't know. What I do know is that that vision taught me that perhaps I do not have all the answers. Perhaps there is more going on in this universe than I can begin to comprehend. What I did gain from that day was a profound sense that the universe, although mysterious and powerful, is also benevolent, and that we may all be connected in ways beyond our imagination.

Why Does Addressing Fear of Death Matter?

Why is it important to explore our fears of death and dying? Why should we approach the pain that comes with the loss of loved ones? What might these experiences mean to and for us? Arguably, we may think of fear as contributing to many problems of humanity, including many of the challenges presented in this book. Thus, we propose that there is much to be gained by approaching and exploring the meaning-making that can come with effectively coping with the fear of death and dying. Specifically, a better understanding of what helps humans effectively cope with the death of the physical body appears to be significantly related to a sense of meaning and existence beyond this physical realm – be that a religious, cultural, or personal belief system or a personal experience. The idea of making meaning by being part of something ongoing or larger than oneself has demonstrated positive impact on human emotions and behaviors (Cox & McAdams, 2014). Overcoming fear of death and understanding that we are all connected now and forever would go a long way to reduce this fear and make a happy life possible now. Imagine if all of humanity recognized the connectedness of our existence. Imagine a world focused on promoting and celebrating this inter-relatedness! Imagine the positive impact on the world if everyone behaved as if we were connected in a larger way to others or that we would see each other again. There may be more to our existence than we can even imagine. Opening our hearts and minds to possibilities is a start.

What You Can Do Now

Meditation for Addressing Fear of Death

Death is a heavy topic for many of us, and it can be difficult to come to terms with death of any kind – death of a beloved public figure, like Kobe Bryant and his daughter, of a family member or pet, or even the death of a total stranger. One of the interesting things about death, though, is that it truly is a fundamental part of life. Everyone will experience it. To address our fear of death, we may practice the following meditation, which is inspired by Ajahn Achalo's, *Accepting Death – Forgiveness in the Face of Death* meditation:

1. Find a comfortable seated position and close or lower your eyes. Focus on your inhale and exhale, thinking to yourself, 'I inhale,' as you inhale, and, 'I exhale' as you exhale
2. As you focus deeper on your breath, bring to mind the fact that death is part of life. Death is inevitable
3. As you inhale, notice that when you pause between the inhale and exhale, there is death – the death of that inhale. As you exhale, pause, noticing the death of that exhale
4. Life is full of little deaths – the end of your inhale and exhale is one example
5. Perhaps you may repeat to yourself this phrase, taken from Ajahn Achalo's 'Accepting Death – Forgiveness in the Face of Death' meditation: 'Death is not the opposite of life. It is the consequence of birth.' You may state the first phrase to yourself as you inhale: 'Death is not the opposite of life.' On the exhale: 'Death is the consequence of birth'
6. Slowly bring your attention back to the breath. As the topic of death can be heavy, it's important to balance our awareness of death with loving-kindness
7. On the inhale, repeat this phrase to yourself: 'I am one with the present moment.' On the exhale, repeat this phrase: 'I love and am loved'

8 You may choose to send any other message of loving-kindness to yourself, such as: ‘I forgive myself for my wrongdoings. I forgive those who have wronged me’ or ‘I am filled with love and gratitude. May all beings be happy and free’

9 Focus on your breath silently for a few moments, and then bring some movement back to the body. Send a deep bow of gratitude for yourself and all beings for acknowledging the beauty of this life, and, ultimately, of death

Physical Exercise

Death Is a Part of Life

We may come to terms with death through yoga asana practice as well. The following practice is meant to help us understand and cope with death while extending love to ourselves and others.

1 Begin in a comfortable seated position, placing your hands over your heart. Begin to focus on your breathing, noticing any changes in the breath

2 As you breathe, noticing any changes that arise, focus on the impermanence of breath – each inhalation and exhalation is different from the one before it. In fact, all things are impermanent, even the lives of our loved ones and our homes and our bodies. Try to keep this notion of impermanence in your mind as you breathe and eventually as you come into movement

3 Slowly begin to extend both arms to the sky. Place your right palm on the ground and reach your left arm to the right, stretching the side body. Stretch there for two breaths, and then repeat on the left – placing the left palm on the floor, stretching the right arm to the left

4 Next, as you inhale, place your right palm slightly behind your right hip, placing your left palm on your right knee. Exhale as you gently twist to the right palm. Repeat on the opposite side

5 Now interlace your fingers, pressing the palms toward your front, arms extended in front of you, and round the back as you inhale. As you exhale, extend your interlaced hands to the sky and arch the back, lifting the face to the sky

6 Place your arms in front of you and sit back on your heels for child’s pose. You may choose to do any other pose that feels restful or calming

7 As you sit in child’s pose, come back to this notion of impermanence, embracing it the same way you would joy or excitement

8 Finally, come to savasana, laying on your back with your legs extended and arms resting by your side. This is sometimes called

'corpse pose,' and can help us to understand impermanence at all levels, including that of the body. As you lay here, try to keep in mind that everything is impermanent, and that death is simply a part of life

9 Death and impermanence often help us to regain sight of the present moment, as our future plans don't seem to matter as much when we realize the fact that we all will die. Impermanence teaches us that the present is all we have – and it's what we must embrace to enjoy a life well lived

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Epilogue

An Additional Word about Yoga and Meditation with Resources

In the Western world, yoga is widely perceived to be the physical practice of stretching and breathing; essentially, it is largely viewed as another kind of 'workout.' While this may technically be true at some level, it's important to understand the physical aspect of yoga as a linking of the mind, body, and breath – in other words, the *āsana.* According to T.K.V. Desikachar, *āsana* translates to 'posture' and is derived from the Sanskrit root *as,* meaning 'to stay,' 'to sit,' or 'to be established in a particular position' (Desikachar, 1995). Patañjali's Yoga Sutras, the oldest and most widely studied texts on yoga, indicate that the āsana has two primary components: *sthira* – steadiness and alertness – and *sukha* – remaining comfortable (Desikachar, 1995; Satchidananda, 2012). Both sthira and sukha must be present in any posture; ultimately, we should feel both alert and at peace while expressing a yoga pose. It's important to note that it is unlikely that this will be achieved at the very beginning of a yoga practice; it will likely take time, effort, and consistent practice to come to a place where both sthira and sukha are fully and equally present in an āsana. That's where another core component of āsana comes in – we must meet ourselves where we are, fully accept ourselves, recognize our own starting points, and start there. Just like many things in life, we must begin with acceptance. Our āsana practice will grow richer with deeper self-acceptance. However, we must also realize that yoga is much more than physical exercise – and its origins can help us to cultivate a deeper understanding of this sacred practice.

According to T.K.V. Desikachar, yoga's origins arise in the Vedas, which is the oldest record of Indian culture and is 'one of the six fundamental systems of Indian thought known as *darśana*' (Desikachar, 1995). This phrase is derived from the Sanskrit root *dṛs*, which can be understood as 'to see,' with darśana meaning 'point of view' or 'sight' (Desikachar, 1995). The additional five darśana are *nyāya, vaiśeṣika, sāṃkhya, mimāmsā*, and *vedānta.* One of the most widely read texts focusing on the meaning of yoga as an element of *darśana* is the Yoga Sutras, written by the ancient sage Patañjali. While many of the details of Patañjali's life remain unknown, it is estimated that the sage (or, perhaps, group of sages under the same name) compiled the Yoga Sutras sometime between 5,000 B.C. and 300 A.D. (Satchidananda, 2012). While Patañjali may not have necessarily 'created' Rāja Yoga, he systematized it and compiled the Yoga Sutras, which are even today the basis for all types of yoga and meditation practices around the world, including those listed in this book.

One of the biggest questions readers may think when they read about yoga or want to begin practicing yoga is, simply, 'What is yoga?' This question is much more complex than it may initially seem, as a myriad of definitions of yoga have been posited throughout its existence. Desikachar provides a variety of definitions that, while seemingly different, are all interrelated in their meanings. One commonly provided definition of yoga is 'to come together' or 'to unite,' while another defines yoga as 'to tie the strands of the mind together.' Another meaning may be understood as 'to attain what was previously unattainable' – this may be applied to physical practice (touching your toes for the first time), spiritual practice (learning the meaning of yoga), or internal practice (understanding yourself further via introspection or a conversation with another person) (Desikachar, 1995). And, yet, there are even more ways to understand yoga! One of my personal favorite ways to understand and practice yoga is to think of it as mindful attention to the present moment or task at hand. Desikachar offers this definition: 'Yoga attempts to create a state in which we are always present – really present – in every action, in every moment' (Desikachar, 1995).

Yoga is also understood by many as a connection with the universe or God – 'to be one with the divine' (Desikachar, 1995). A yoga practitioner doesn't necessarily need to be religious or identify the 'divine' in a specific way to experience this connection; simply, this definition of yoga points to its ability to provide those who practice it with an understanding of a higher power and our connection to it and to all sentient beings.

While you, reader, are welcome to interpret this meaning of yoga (or any of the other definitions included here!), please note that for the purposes of this book, the practices listed at the end of each chapter are primarily secular and not necessarily based in any one religious or spiritual practice. Some of these practices are grounded in Buddhist and Tibetan practices, as well as empirically supported psychological exercises, as our collective meditation and yoga experience has been largely grounded in a mixture of these practices.

While this isn't a yoga or meditation book, and as such I will not go into depth about each of the Yoga Sutras or provide extensive information on poses, or the fundamentals of mindfulness, there are resources from which I've learned an immense amount of knowledge on yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, which I've listed below:

- The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice by T.K.V. Desikachar
- The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali by Sri Swami Satchidananda
- Bhagavad Gita, translated by Stephen Mitchell
- Every Body Yoga: Let Go of Fear, Get on the Mat, Love Your Body by Jessamyn Stanley
- Mindfulness for Beginners by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Radical Acceptance by Tara Brach
- The 4 Foundations of Mindfulness in Plain English by Bhante Gunaratana
- Yoga is Dead Podcast hosted by Jesal Parikh and Tejal Patel

I hope that these resources, along with this book, will facilitate a love for and appreciation for your breath, your being, and your life.

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