

TEACHING IN THE POST-COVID CLASSROOM



Mindsets and Strategies to **Cultivate
Connection, Manage Behavior and Reduce
Overwhelm** in Classroom, Distance
And Blended Learning

GRACE STEVENS

COMPANION WORK BOOK

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This workbook is intended as a companion piece to help you work through exercises suggested in the Teaching in the Post Covid Classroom book.
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EXERCISE ONE - Your Teaching North Star



Defining your “teaching truths” is important. There are so many distractions for teachers. We are constantly being asked to try new techniques and technologies, updated curriculums and implement “the next best thing” in education. If we aren’t mindful, our teaching can become an unfocused collection of strategies and routines that “check all the boxes” that administrators demand, but distract us from our true path.

Taking time to define what we know in our heart and experience to be true about what students need and what teacher’s should provide is a powerful exercise. Our “truths” act as a North Star to guide us on our way when things seem overly complicated and we are overwhelmed.

I invite you to define your truths for yourself, and use them as a compass to help you navigate the challenges ahead in teaching.

Don’t cheat yourself out of this exercise if you are new to teaching and think you don’t have enough experience to define this yet. Let your instinct guide you.

Here are my “truths” about what students need to feel:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Here are my “truths” about teaching:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

If you are struggling to define your truths, think about your legacy. When students, colleagues, parents and administrators gather around to celebrate you at your retirement, what kind of words do you want them to use to describe you? How do you want to be remembered? What do you want your teaching legacy to be?

Our truths evolve over time. I encourage you to revisit this exercise in a year or two, and see if your North Star compass is still accurate.

EXERCISE TWO - Reframe the Narrative You Tell Yourself About Teaching

The story we tell ourselves matters. Other people's experience does not need to be our experience. We get to create our own. That's not a "woo-woo" New Age opinion. That's a fact backed by psychology and neurobiology. So it makes sense that the most resourceful thing to do is to focus on the positive aspects of our profession when telling ourselves and others our teaching story.

Now, I'm not suggesting we make things up. Of course, the teaching landscape is full of challenges and unknowns. But there are still many positives. If we stick with the "facts" of our own situation, not the "opinions" of others on snarky social media memes or staff room complaint sessions, we might find that the story is more uplifting than we think.

Take some time to reframe your narrative about teaching as a profession, about students, about your current school or district. Imagine that you run into an old friend from high school. They haven't seen you since before you were a teacher. What are you telling them?

Here's an example of how I reframed my narrative.

As you may remember from the book, I had worked myself into a state of exhaustion and insecurity in my teaching position. I was constantly anxious and second guessing myself. The story I told myself was that my district was high pressure and solely focused on student data and results. There was a high level of competitiveness between everyone, (students, teachers, administrators, parents!) and an implied expectation that teachers should work 50-60 hours a week. When asked to describe the district, my default response was, "It's a pressure cooker."

When I challenged myself to reframe the narrative based on some positives and actual FACTS, it was a game changer. My motivation, my stress level, and how I showed up in the classroom all changed. My classroom and my teaching were transformed.

You may remember me explaining how I reframed the narrative I was telling myself about my principal. On a side note, I value and respect his opinion and friendship so much now that he is no longer my boss. I would feel a hundred times more confident returning to school in the fall if he were in charge. OK, that's funny. That's not a resourceful narrative. Let's reframe that! "I'm excited to see what we can learn from the new administrator." Which is true becomes he has pretty awesome credentials. New perspectives can be very refreshing.

Anyway, I started to look at the district as high performing, instead of high pressure. I became in awe of how the district had the knack for attracting and hiring such talented and dedicated professionals. I listed all of the things I had learned in a few short months, and reflected on how willing colleagues and curriculum coaches were to help me and ensure my success. I educated myself on the huge amount of enrichment activities that the parents and teachers offered to the students, giving them a well rounded education that went well beyond test scores. All of those things were facts. I recollected that when I needed to leave campus early or take days off for medical tests, it was never questioned. Looking around the parking lot, there were plenty of teachers who left at a reasonable hour. I take pride in being part of an award-winning district where, in my experience, students are engaged and parents are supportive.

Finally, I reminded myself that I always have a choice. I took the pressure off myself. I have plenty of skills and experience and I could change districts or careers if I chose to. The reality being, I LOVE teaching. I'm not going anywhere.

Now it's your turn. Think about the narrative you tell yourself about teaching. Write a few sentences for each of these areas, focusing on the positive aspects and the FACTS. Don't focus on not what has happened to others, and what their opinion is, but what your experience been.

The story I tell myself about TEACHING :

The story I tell myself about STUDENTS :

The story I tell myself about MY CURRENT SCHOOL :

The story I tell myself about MY COLLEAGUES & MY ADMINISTRATOR:

Personal Reflection:

Are there any other narratives in your life that it would be helpful to reframe?
The story of your childhood? The story of your relationship with your siblings?
The story of your experience parenting?

EXERCISE THREE - Define Your Ideal Classroom Vibe

Close your eyes, take in a breath, and visualize your “best” teaching day.

- What are you doing?
- What are students doing?
- How do students feel about being in the classroom?
- How do you feel?
- What do you see?
- What do you hear?
- What would someone walking into your room observe?
- How would parents describe their child’s experience of being in your classroom?

These are all elements of “vibe.”

Take time to consider what you want the vibe of your classroom to be.

Be sure to focus on what you want, not on what you don’t. For example, “Students are engaged and listening respectfully” as opposed to, “Students aren’t interrupting and being disrespectful.”

Describe your perfect Classroom Vibe here:

Consider, how close are you to achieving this vision?

What are TWO AREAS you could focus on to bring you closer to your vision?

1. _____
2. _____

EXERCISE FOUR - Inventory of Digital Assets

Make a list of your “ready to deploy” digital assets. Which units/projects/ assignments do you have ready to go in the event that we need to pivot to distance learning again? Consider if you are leveraging the best use of technology. Also, can any element of collaboration or choice be incorporated into the assignment?

Assignment Name	Can an element of CHOICE be added? How?	Can an element of COLLABORATION be added? How?

EXERCISE FIVE - Reclaiming Your Schedule

Make a list of all of the “extra” duties that you are currently involved in that go above and beyond your contractual obligations. For each one answer the questions. This should give you a “snap shot” of your current commitments.

Type of Commitment	Stipend Y/N Amount	Scale 1-10 of your PASSION For this	Length of Commitment

Take a realistic look at this snapshot. Be honest about whether the committees and activities add joy and satisfaction to your life, or leave you feeling depleted and resentful.

If adjustments can be made, commit to a timeline.

SCRIPT WRITING

For future situations, you should have some sentences ready and practiced to help you graciously decline.

Here are some examples:

“Thank you for thinking of me, but I’m unable to help you with that at this time. Good luck with the project!”

“Let me check my schedule and get back to you.”

These are in my voice. If this doesn’t sound authentic to your voice, write two sample sentences here:

1. _____
2. _____

Practice them!

Remember, if your administrator is asking you be sure to use a **STUDENT FOCUSED** reason to graciously decline.

For example,

“Thanks for thinking of me but right now I’m focusing 100% of my attention on my students who need some extra instructional support. They deserve all of my attention and any extra time I have.”

Now you try.

1. _____
2. _____

Practice! Remember, you can always buy some time if you are taken off guard. Also, you don’t owe any apologies.

E-mail responses are often a good idea so that you can keep a paper trail.

EXERCISE SIX - Wheel of School/Life Balance

This wheel is a modification of an exercise regularly used by professional coaches. It is an effective tool to help you quickly identify areas of your life that are out of balance. It was originally developed by Paul J. Meyer, founder of Success Motivators Institute™. I have adapted it to be most relevant to your work/life balance as a teacher. This exercise only takes 10-15 minutes to complete, and it is well worth the time investment.

To be of maximum benefit, this exercise should be periodically revisited, so keep a few blank copies of the wheel. It is a good practice to check in with this tool at least once a year, or after specific times when life has caused you to have to focus exclusively in one area. We all experience life challenges at certain times that will cause us to shift our priorities temporarily. There will be times when we're in transition with life situations or careers or when we are sick or injured or need to attend to sick or aging family members. At these times we can't be in perfect balance. However, having our lives be in balance most of the time will help us deal more gracefully with challenging times. Having a "road map" will also help us get back in balance sooner once the challenging time is over. So the exercise below is not designed to be done only once. It is a tool that can be completed quickly and easily any time you want to perform a work/life balance checkup.

Here are the eight areas that we will be exploring with this wheel:

- Self-Care/Physical Health
- Self-Care/Mental Health
- Fun Factor/Lifestyle
- Social Relations - Outside of School
- Social Relations - Inside School
- Purpose
- Personal Growth
- Financial Health

Here's how to complete the wheel.

1. For each question, give a score from 1-10, with 10 being the highest. Think about each question, but also go with your instinct feeling of what number comes to mind. Remember, this is not an assignment you are going to have to share or get graded on! It is a tool to help you gain an understanding of where your work/life balance currently is, and where opportunities for improvement may be. It is not a tool for you to beat yourself up with. It is a tool to help you gain clarity, and feel empowered to know where you should focus.
2. Once you have completed all 10 questions for a domain, find the average score. Round the scores up or down accordingly.

3. Place the scores on the chart with a dot.
4. Connect the dots.
5. Observe your wheel and analyze the results. How does the wheel look? Is it balanced? Are there some obvious spots where scores are low?
6. Remember – Print out an extra copy of the blank wheel before you start so that you can keep a “master” copy for later use.

Self-Care/Physical Health

I am current with all my health check-ups, including my dentist and eye doctor.	
I am a healthy weight.	
I sleep without interruption 7-8 hours a night.	
I eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.	
I drink at least 6 glasses of water a day.	
I get regular exercise.	
I don't engage in excessive drinking or use of drugs (prescription or recreational).	
I make sure I am not sitting all day.	
I take pride in my appearance.	
I am happy with the way my body looks and feels.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

Self-Care/Mental Health

I set a positive intention for my day.	
I catch myself when I am focusing on what I don't want and choose more productive thoughts.	
I surround myself with positive people.	
I am present as much as I can be during the day.	
I write down 3 things I am grateful for every day.	
I practice Brain Breaks or meditate daily.	
I am mindful of my mental diet and watch TV shows/read blogs/ listen to podcasts that fill me up, not deplete me.	
I limit my exposure to TV news and social media.	
I read something inspirational every day, even if just for a few minutes.	
I practice positive mindsets and take responsibility for my own happiness.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

Fun Factor/Lifestyle

I feel I have enough free time to pursue leisure activities.	
I have varied interests and hobbies that have nothing to do with school and students (e.g., coaching sports doesn't count).	
I do at least one thing outside school every day that I enjoy.	
I attend cultural events monthly.	
I have a garden that I tend to or some other way to enjoy nature every day.	
I take time to be playful every day with my students, my children or my pets.	
I have dreams, and I take time to think about them.	
I leave town on vacation at least once a year.	
I have an outlet for my creativity.	
I read for leisure and enjoy it.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

Social Relations (Family & Friends)

I engage with the family members I live with daily.	
My family gets the best of me.	
I talk to my family I don't live with weekly.	
I take responsibility for my relationship with all my family members.	
There is no-one in my family I hold a grudge against.	
My relationships with my family and friends are rewarding and stress-free.	
I meet/talk with my friends at least once a week.	
My friends are a positive influence on my life.	
My social relations leave me filled up, not depleted.	
I trust my family and friends.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

Work Relations (Colleagues, Students & Parents)

My relationships with colleagues are rewarding and stress-free.	
I enjoy my colleagues and feel connected to them.	
I engage in positive conversations with colleagues, not gossiping or complaining.	
I feel I can rely on, trust and productively problem solve with my colleagues.	
I enjoy my students and feel connected to them.	
I feel my students respect me.	
I feel my colleagues and administrators respect me and recognize my contributions.	
I feel parents respect me.	
I take responsibility for my relationships at school.	
I respond, not react, to difficult situations adults and children at school.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

Purpose

I feel my role as a teacher has purpose.	
I feel I have a positive impact on my students and my community.	
I believe I play an important role in making the world a better place.	
I feel connected to something greater than myself that gives me peace.	
I practice intentional acts of kindness.	
I strive to positively impact every situation I encounter or interaction I engage in.	
I view teaching more as a calling than a career.	
I take responsibility for my job satisfaction.	
I feel passionate about the work I do.	
I don't need external recognition or validation to feel good about what I do.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

Personal Growth

I have work/life balance.	
I have a mentor who I trust.	
I stretch myself by mentoring someone else.	
I continue to improve my skills so that I can be a better teacher.	
I continue to learn skills that enrich my own life and that have nothing to do with teaching (for example, learn a new language or new hobby, learn to meditate).	
I have goals for my life, and I am pursuing them.	
I strive to be more present and joyful every day.	
I am proactively learning more about myself.	
I read and listen to podcasts/audiobooks for personal development, not just entertainment.	
I make personal growth and increased happiness a priority.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

Mark it on the chart.

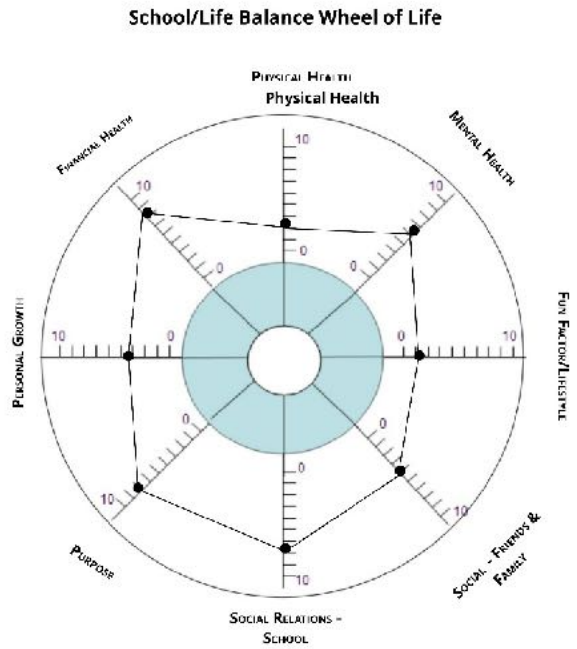
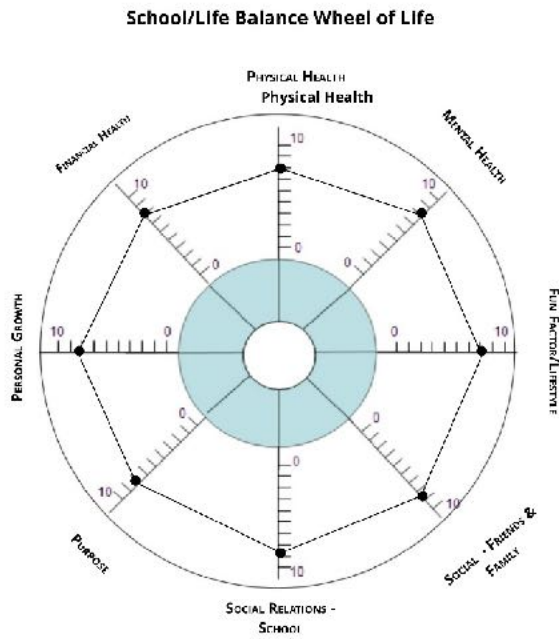
Financial Health

I have 3 months of expenses in cash in the event of an emergency.	
I carry Disability Insurance and Life Insurance through my school (if offered).	
I contribute to my retirement above what is automatically deducted for my state retirement plan.	
I know whom to contact when the time comes to start planning my retirement (it's never too early to plan!)	
I am educated on how years of service and supplemental educational units will affect my salary if I change school districts.	
I regularly invest in training and additional credentials that may increase my earning potential.	
I feel my school district pays a competitive wage and that I am fairly compensated compared to other teachers.	
I spend less than I make.	
I have a budget that allows for saving for things that I look forward to such as vacations and fun activities.	
I unsubscribe from paid services I don't use.	
TOTAL SCORE	

What is your total score divided by 10? _____

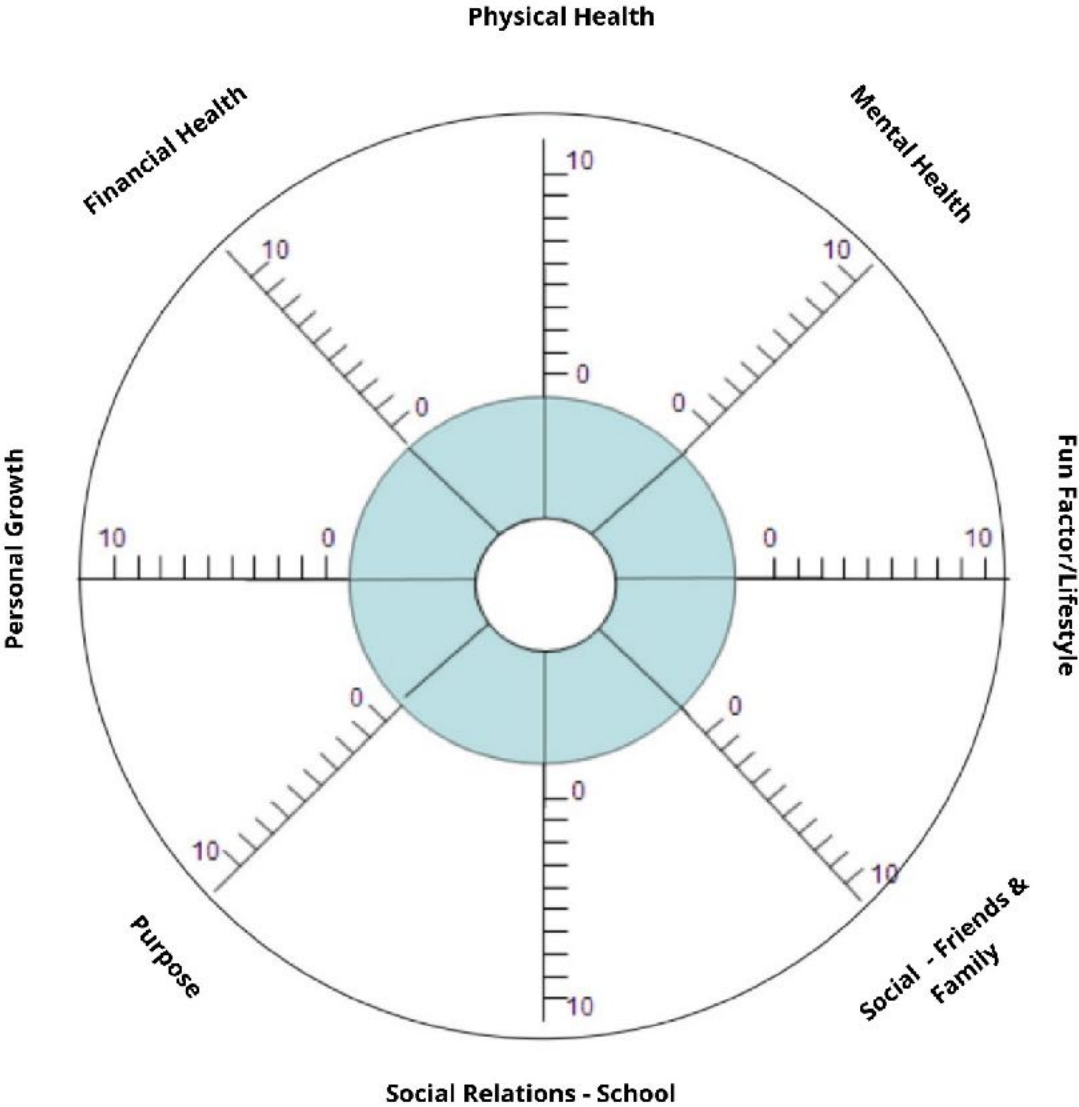
Mark it on the chart.

Here are two samples of completed charts. Hopefully, yours looks more like the balanced one. If not, you now have some good information on where to focus your energy.



Blank School/Life Wheel of Life Template

School/Life Balance Wheel of Life



Final Thoughts

I thank you from the bottom of heart for that you do for children. By choosing to teach we have chosen a career that is rewarding, exhilarating, and fun as well as exhausting, frustrating and overwhelming all on the same day! We have chosen to touch the lives of children and to shape the future. Yes, teaching is tough. But so are we.

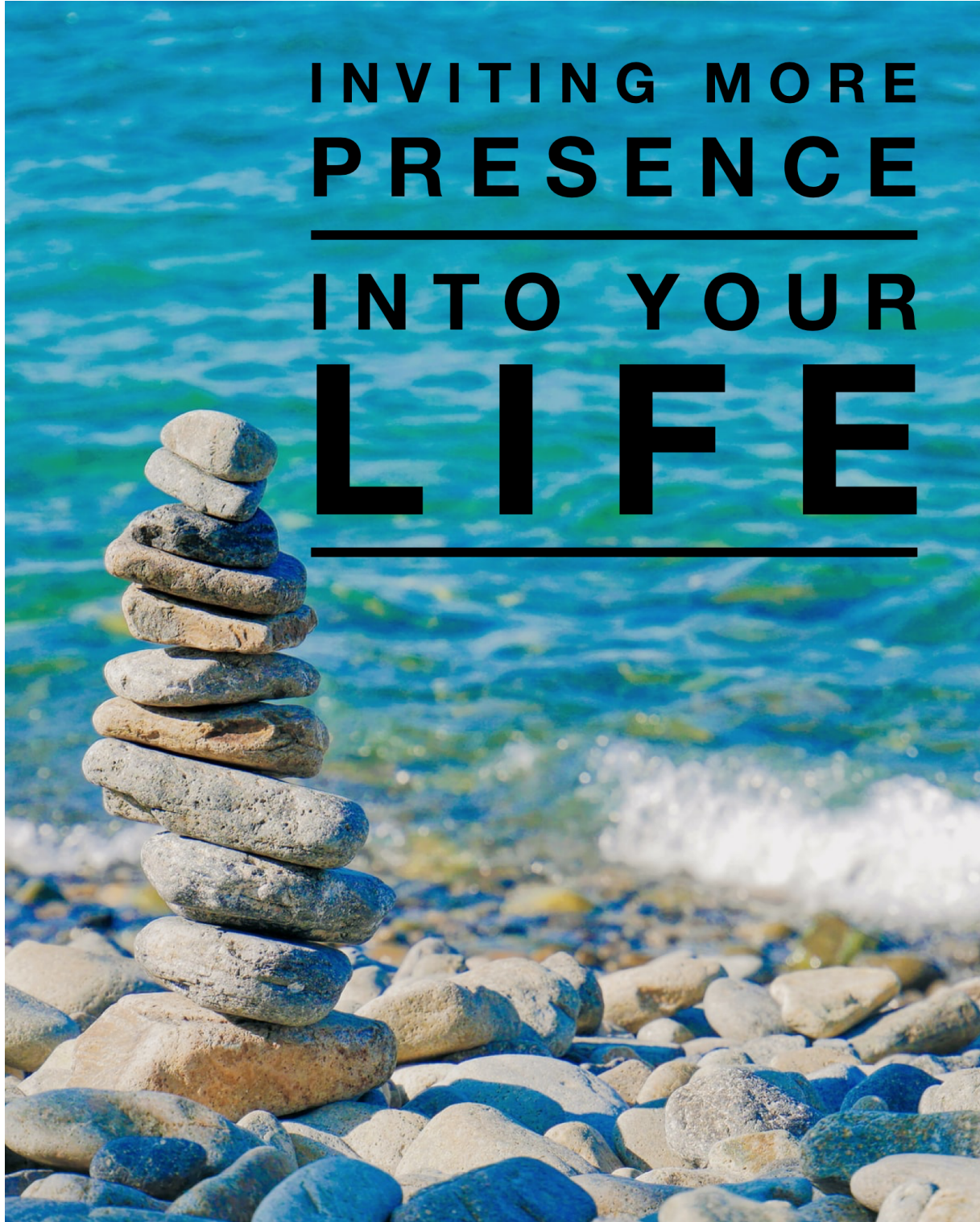
Be well!

Grace

P.S. Some of you may know that I have written a book on mindfulness meditation in the past. One of the most effective ways to reduce stress is to practice mindfulness. When I was experiencing my teaching drama I was frustrated at myself because I was aware that I had the tools and knowledge to feel better, but for some reason I thought I was too overwhelmed and “too busy” to use them. I completely neglected any mindfulness practice and other areas of self-care. Which was just one more form of self-sabotage.

I put together this bonus section for you as a quick crash course in being more present focused. At the end you will find a great check list of simple things you can do every day to help you connect to the present moment. They are all simple but effective practices. Take baby steps! Try focusing on two or three a day. Set them as an intention in your Positive Mindset Journal. I promise you, you will be pleasantly surprised. Enjoy :)

BONUS MATERIAL



“Stop acting as if life is a rehearsal. Live this day as if it were your last. The past is over and gone. The future is not guaranteed.” - Wayne Dyer

This quote reflects the power of living in the now. Right now, this very moment, is the one we are given. The past is over. The future isn't guaranteed. But today, this very moment is. Learning to live in the present moment gives you the power to live your best life, to the fullest, every moment of the day.

What does “living in the moment” mean?

To live in the moment or live in the now, means you are being conscious, and aware of your present using all your senses. It means you aren't living in the past nor are you worrying about what the future will be.

When you concentrate on being present, you focus your attention on the task at hand. You give it your full attention and let go of the outcome. Seizing the moment allows you to make each moment more meaningful and valuable, savoring every minute for quality over quantity of time.

You still need to plan, set goals, and prepare for the future. But you can do all these things and still enjoy living in the moment. For instance, you may set a goal to exercise every day. You can do this while enjoying it while you are doing the exercise or at the very least be in the moment as you do it.

Too often we put enormous expectations on ourselves. We're always rushing to do this or finish that or hurry up doing something else. We never actually enjoy the process. We're rushing and we don't even know why most of the time.

We don't stop and think about where we are, so we miss the point of being there. Instead with the power of living in the now we learn to appreciate each moment and gather the lessons from each moment. We are living consciously, purposefully, and responsibly.

On the other hand, when we live in the past, hanging onto painful experiences, difficult times or wrongs we perceived done to us, we are condemning ourselves to living the same now and in the future. Coming to terms with the past, knowing you cannot change it, helps you move on.

Living in the now means letting go of the past. It means you trust in the future. You're positive and optimistic in the present leaving you open to the possibility of a promising future.

The power of living in the now allows you to begin to notice the beauty and wonder of the moment and the things around you. You learn how to focus and manage your energy. This is just one of the benefits of living in the now.

In this guide you'll discover there are a multitude of other benefits you will receive from practicing the mindfulness of living in the now. And you'll discover how to put it into practice. It's not as easy as just saying you're going to live in the moment from now on. But it isn't as difficult as you may believe either.

This guide will help you discover what not to do and how to make simple techniques you can begin using to live a more mindful life. We'll discuss what it means to be mindful and give you some tips for doing it.

Benefits of Mindful Living

*“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, worry about the future, or anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.”
– Buddha*

Living in the moment is beneficial in many ways. From your physical health to your mental status, being mindful enhances your life. Here are several ways living in the moment benefits you:

Better health

By reducing stress and anxiety you are able to avoid the health consequences associated with them. This includes high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity.

Psychological health

Being mindful improves your psychological well-being because you are more in tune with what is happening around and within you.

Improves relationships

Most of us have been with someone who is with you physically, but their mind is a million miles away. This makes the relationship extremely difficult. But when you are with someone who is fully present is enjoyable and creates a deeper connection. By living in the now, you can be the person others enjoy being with and make your relationships easier.

Better self-control

When you are living in the moment, you are in better control over your mind, your body and your emotions. You no longer have a racing mind and unpredictable emotions controlling your life.

Better focus

Living a mindful life allows you to stay focused on what's happening in the present. You are not worrying about what happened in the past or stressing about what might happen in the future. You're able to focus fully on the now.

Healthier choices

Being mindful helps you prevent binge eating. Instead you make healthier food choices because you are paying attention to what you choose to eat and how much you eat. Food tastes better because you're paying attention to all the sensations of each bite. You savor each bite by putting your fork down between bites.

Better decisions

Living in the now helps you make better decisions. You are more aware of your circumstances and opportunities.

Lose overwhelm

Living in the now helps you see what needs to be done now instead of being overwhelmed by the scope of a large project.

You're more relaxed

You are more in tune with the world around you instead of being lost in your own thoughts all the time. You are able to identify what bothers you and not stress over it.

Living in the moment has an abundant number of benefits that can help you improve your life. It helps you stay healthier, have less stress and be more aware of each moment of the day.

Why Living in the Moment is Difficult

Even though there are many benefits of living in the moment, it can often be difficult to do. All our lives we've been encouraged to think about the future and remember the past. Advertising, notifications, messages, reminders, alerts are all geared to what's coming up or what happened previously. We tend to get caught up in what's going on around us that we don't pay attention to what's happening in the moment.

Why is this a problem? The problem comes from the stress, strain, wear, and tear of living on a day-to-day basis causing us emotional and physical problems. Here are other factors that contribute to living in the now:

When you're in the flow, fully engrossed in what you're doing and end up getting pulled away from it by a notification or message on your phone. This pulls you away from the present and being aware. This is one reason living in the moment is difficult.

The basic nature of our mind is to dwell on our past and worry about our future. We face a lot of uncertainty that causes anxiety when we live in the moment. When you are fully into the moment you aren't thinking about what will happen in the next, which can cause some stress about what is going to happen.

We have a hard time keeping focused on the moment. Our minds naturally wander. We have an innate ability to always be thinking, wandering, asking, pondering, and just having random thoughts.

We don't worry about the present moment because it's already decided. That means our mind naturally goes to the past or to predicting the future. We use our past as the basis for what the future will be. This tendency can get out of control and we begin to see dangers that are not actually there.

There is comfort in the possibility of what's to come, something that lies beyond today – hope. We have hope that tomorrow will be better than this moment, this now. So, we are constantly thinking of what is next.

These thoughts, assumptions and fears keep us from living in the present moment. It can be hard fighting these issues, but we can change the tendencies of our brains. Practicing mindfulness helps us get stronger at it and makes it possible to overcome the harmful or destructive choices and make better ones.

How to Start Living in The Moment

Now that you know why it's difficult to live in the moment but that it's beneficial to you, how do you start doing it? Here are 21 tips to put mindfulness into practice.

1. Slow down. Before beginning any activity, no matter what it is, take a deep breath and focus on the process.
2. Start making an effort to live in the moment. Make the commitment to begin changing your habits of rushing, not paying attention, and functioning by going through the motions. Notice where you are not being mindful.
3. Practice being mindful. Practice by doing tasks you normally do impatiently or unconsciously mindfully instead.

4. Notice when you aren't in the present moment. When you are in a present moment that is stressful, notice how your thoughts and emotions are affecting your body. Turn those thoughts into more positive ones that keep you in the now.
5. Engage in what you are doing. Feel into it and enjoy the process.
6. Learn relaxation techniques to help you be calm. These include meditating, deep breathing, and visualization.
7. Train your mind to focus on the current activity.
8. Listen attentively to your conversations, music, and the silence around you.
9. Take notice of your surroundings. What do you see, hear, smell, and feel?
10. Savor your food and drink. Slowly chew, enjoy the taste, and set your utensil down between bites.
11. Think about the past, but only in small doses. Be sure to focus on the past for a specific reason such as to relive a happy experience, figure out where you went wrong or to identify a key to a past success.
12. As with the past, think about the future small amounts at a time. Focus on the future in a healthy way. Leave the worrying out of it. Just visit the future long enough to prepare for it then return to the moment.
13. Get rid of unneeded possessions. Minimalism helps you live in the present. You aren't living in the past from items associated with past memories allowing you to live in the moment.
14. Start each day with a smile. Each day is full of possibilities. You can control your attitude every morning. Keep it optimistic and intentional.
15. Be fully appreciative of the moments of today. Soak in everything about today- the sounds, sights, the smells, the emotions you feel, the wins and the sorrows. This is living but we often forget to take them in and appreciate them.
16. Let go of past hurts and resentments. Choose to forgive and move on. Don't let the harm impact your present mood.
17. Love what you do. If you just survive your work and are constantly waiting for the weekend to get here, you're wasting a good portion of your life. Either find a new job you enjoy or find things about your current career you can appreciate.
18. Stop worrying about tomorrow or what might happen. Realize that tomorrow will happen no matter what. Redirect your mental energy into enjoying this moment.

19. Listen to your body. Your body will tell you if you are stressing, worrying, or not taking care of it.
20. Change your beliefs and thoughts. Think positively and calmly.
21. Let go of outcomes. When you live in the moment you don't stress or worry over how something will turn out. Take action, focus on the task, and let the outcome happen.

Learning to live in the now is an essential part of living a happy life. Start with one thing you can implement daily and work up to being present in every way.

Train Yourself to Be Mindful

Living in the now helps you be more appreciative of what you have and look forward to the future. There are ways you can train yourself to be more mindful no matter whether you're at home with your family, out for a walk or during work. Start becoming more mindful today by implementing these 7 ways to train yourself to be more mindful.

1. Create what you desire. What do you genuinely want to experience in life? What journey do you want to be following? Being mindful starts with having a vision of what you want your life to be.

There are so many distractions in life that can easily take you off track of your dreams, goals, or ambitions. To accomplish what you want, you have to stay focused during the good and the bad days. On the days you feel like giving up, be mindful of your desires and continue on.

2. Be in alignment with your beliefs and values. Knowing what matters most to you, deepest beliefs and values keeps you on your path. Live every day in alignment with them. When you do this, you are making the decision mentally to be mindful in your life and consciously aware of your life.

When you are mindful in life you are aware of why you do something. You know and understand the reasons why you get up in the morning and go work. You have a purpose for living.

3. Disconnect from society and connect into your mind. We live in a world that's constantly on. Facebook, the internet, messaging, Instagram, emails, television, fast food, billboards, advertising. All these things are noise that is constantly inundating our minds and our lives.

Train yourself to be more mindful by disconnecting from society every once in a while. Instead connect to your own mind. Discover your emotions, thoughts, and feelings going on in your mind. Reflect upon what changes you need to make in your life if you are off course.

4. What is your legacy? What do you want to be remembered by? You can easily get stuck in routine and forget why you do what you do. Take the time to think about the end and why you do the things you do. Doing so keeps you mindful of your goals and values.
5. Have mindful actions. Express yourself through your actions by becoming more aware of the moment. You can be more mindful in a negative way or a positive one. To be positive in your mindful actions, be in the moment, aware of your body, your actions, and your thoughts.

For example, when you walk, about the way you walk. How is your posture? What do you see, smell, hear? Apply this way of being in the now in everything you do.

6. What inspires you? What is your purpose in life? Do you have a reason that inspires you to get up and start your day in a positive way? Or are you living by routine? These routines are draining and take you away from living in the moment.

Get clear on your purpose in life so you can start living each day mindfully. You'll know that everything you do is connected to fulfilling your chosen purpose.

7. Know who you really are inside. Be real in everything you do. It's impossible to live a more mindful life when you are materialistic and fake.

Always remain true to who you are. Stay connected to your inner being. Don't conform to society's expectations of who you are. When you know who you are, what you value and what you stand for, it's easier to live in the now.

Strengthen Your in the Moment Awareness

Besides training yourself to be more mindful there are other exercises you can do to boost your mindfulness and strengthen your "In the now" awareness. These exercises are good ones to try.

1. Do a mindful body scan where you get in touch with your body. Do it in the morning to help you start your day on a good way. Begin by sitting or lying down on your bed. Take a few deep breaths. Take note how your breath enters and leaves your lungs.

Now focus your attention on one part of your body, beginning with your toes. Pay attention to how it feels and any sensations you are feeling. Continue up the body to the next part of your body. This exercise helps put you in a mindful state and helps you notice when your body is feeling differently.

2. Visualize your daily goals and write in your journal. Each morning make an entry into your journal. Then before you start your day, visualize your goals. See yourself taking action on each day and completing your goals.

3. Take a mindful walk in nature. Be intentional with your awareness on your walk. Notice your surroundings, feel your feet hitting the ground with each step you take and listen to all the sounds around you. Feel your breath with each inhale and exhale.
4. Do a mindful review of your day. By the end of the day, you're tired and worn out. It can be easy to let things fall down. When this happens, try doing a review of your day before going to bed. Think back to the beginning of the day and remember how your mindfulness exercises started the day. How did that make you feel?

Then go through the rest of your day, making note of any particularly mindful or memorable events. What was your mood like throughout the day? Write these thoughts down in your journal or a diary.

Using these exercises on a daily basis helps you strengthen your awareness of being in the now. Use them together to get into a habit of being mindful throughout your day.

Simplify your Life

We live in a materialistic world, always wanting more and more stuff. But did you know having all this stuff clutters your mind along with your space. It keeps you from enjoying what you have, wastes time and weighs on your mind the amounts of money you've spent on everything. Simplifying your life is a trick to help you make mindfulness easier in your life.

Eliminating nonessential possessions. But simplifying also means taking control of finances, your time and your commitments and routines.

Here are 4 great ways to help you do just that.

- Learn to say "no" more often. Sometimes we want to accommodate others at the expense of ourselves. But this doesn't actually help you or anyone else in the long term. It drains you, fills up your time and makes you less joyful. Be discriminate in your commitments.
- Clear the clutter. You'll feel lighter when you get rid of things you don't need. Grab some boxes and go through your home, from bottom to top, closet to closet, drawer to drawer, garage and storage areas sorting out everything you have. Trash what's broken, useless, stained and donate what's still good. If you don't use something or look at it more than once or twice a year, it's probably time to give it to someone who will enjoy it. Clean out your classroom!
- Simplify what's left. Now that you've done away with the unnecessary stuff, it's time to re-organize what's left into a workable system. Use closet and drawer organizers with labels. Color-code your clothing so it's easy to see what you have and grab

what you want. File papers you have to keep and scan the rest into a software program on your computer.

- Stop multi-tasking. This scatters your energy. You can't focus on what you're doing, and it takes longer to do three things at time. Divided attention keeps you from living in the now.

Living in the now means finding joy in everything. Simplifying your life in every way allows you to focus on the moment by decluttering what's taking up your time and focus.

Do This Next

“Life is not complex. We are complex. Life is simple, and the simple thing is the right thing.” – Oscar Wilde

The power of living in the now has many benefits. Learning how to implement these techniques in your daily life brings those benefits up front. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, try to be in the moment.

Let go of the past. Much of the mental noise that keeps us from living in the moment concerns what we did, said, happened or should have done in the past or what we want, plan, worry about or fear in the future. Make it a point to focus solely on the now as much as possible.

When you feel yourself getting stuck in the same old routine or are in fear of the past or what might be, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you enjoy your work? Do you focus on getting it finished too much to enjoy it?
- Are you stressed trying to do your best?
- Are you distracted by work and don't spend weekends with your family?
- Are you stressing over regrets of the past that you miss opportunities in the present?
- Do others' opinions stop you from being genuine?
- Do you feel stressed and anxious all the time?

When you are absorbed in the now your mind becomes peaceful and life becomes less stressful.

Take inventory of everything on the list below that you currently do already. Aim to add two to three new practices a week.

The Power of Living in the Now Checklist

Goal Statement: I benefit from living in the moment when:

- I take a deep breath before beginning a task and focus.
- I make a conscious effort to notice when I am not being mindful of the present.
- I practice being patient and calm while doing tasks that tend to frustrate me.
- I recognize when my thoughts are on the past or future and return to the present.
- I engage fully in the task or activity I commit to, until it is completed.
- I start each day with a smile and smile frequently throughout the day.
- I find many small things to appreciate and be grateful for in each day.
- I refuse to worry about tomorrow and what 'might' happen.
- I let go of past hurts and resentment to make room for forgiveness.
- I listen to my body for signs of stress and take the appropriate actions.
- I use all of my senses to experience the fullness of the moment.
- I choose to make choices and decisions that make me a better person.
- I make a point to compliment others to encourage and inspire them.
- I examine my negative thoughts and change any wrong thinking to think positively.
- I am aware of the things that trigger unhealthy thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
- I take steps to ensure I can focus on the present without disruption.
- I practice controlling my focus by meditating regularly.
- I enjoy learning more about myself and others when I live in the moment.
- I forgive myself when I make mistakes.
- I learn what works and what doesn't when I am mindful of the present.
- I use my senses in the present to make events more memorable.
- I resist the urge to procrastinate.
- I make it easier to savor each moment by following a routine.
- I take steps to make my life and home simple, organized, and guilt-free.
- I refuse to multi-task because it steals time from being in the moment.
- I am able to find a positive aspect in every situation.
- I find a way to enjoy tasks, situations, and people that I don't particularly like.
- I am more creative when I'm sensitive to what happens in my surroundings.
- I know who I am, what I stand for, and what I want out of life.