

Mindfulness

Maintaining Calm During Times of Uncertainty

In New Brunswick and across the world, we are currently experiencing a time of uncertainty which is particularly unsettling for educators, families and students. Being mindful of our feelings and emotions will help us to distance ourselves from uncertainty and help us to make positive decisions for ourselves and our loved ones.

The STOP strategy¹ is one method that can help you maintain awareness and calm throughout this time.



S

The Stop Strategy

Stop

Notice when you begin to feel the signs of stress (chest tightening, face becoming warm, forehead creasing). Then, stop and take a pause. Taking cues from your body will help you to disrupt a potentially negative mindset.



T



Take a Breath

Just take a slow breath. Only focus on that breath. Your brain needs an opportunity to distance itself from the stress. You need a chance to gain clarity. Focus on the air going in and out of your lungs. The 2-3 minutes it takes to breathe and reset your thoughts will allow you the best opportunity to make positive choices.

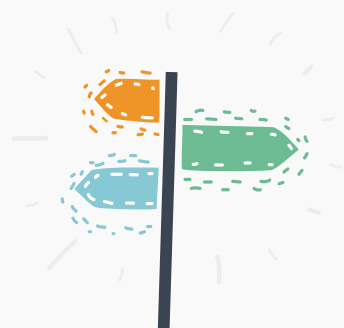
O

Observe

Once you have allowed your brain an opportunity to become calm, acknowledge what is happening, be it good or bad, inside or outside of you. Just note it. Don't act, yet. Just acknowledge for yourself what you are feeling, seeing, hearing or thinking. Emotions are information. Take a moment to process the information.



P



Proceed

Having briefly checked in with yourself, and allowing yourself a moment to pause, go forward with a more aware and neutral mindset.

Examples

Families

You are now working from home, and your three children (ages 4, 7, and 12) are home with you. Your middle child has identified behavioural challenges, but you know your oldest is great with keeping her busy. You decide to come out from the makeshift office in your bedroom to get a glass of water. You scan the house and the mess is overwhelming. You feel your chest tighten. Use the STOP strategy now. When you are ready to proceed, you decide that the mess will have to wait. You will come up with a solution later to help the kids understand the importance of respecting themselves and the house, by cleaning up as they go.

Students

You are in Grade 8, your last year of middle school. As someone new to Canada who is still learning English, you have overcome a lot since you've arrived in New Brunswick. You are still working on your language, but people tell you how much you have improved. This year came with a lot more homework and assignments, but you worked hard and did the best you could. You are proud of your progress, but still unsure how this will look in terms of marks. You are worrying and wondering if you did enough to move to the next grade level. Use the STOP strategy now. When you are ready to proceed, you think about the ways you can continue learning every day so that you can show what you know. You consider that you will be able to contact your teacher or principal in the coming weeks to check on where you stand. You decide to wait and act when you can instead of worrying.

Educators

You love teaching Grade 5. You miss your students greatly and were looking forward to celebrating with them as they transition to middle school. Many of them are in the school play that you were directing, and a few of them you know come from difficult home circumstances. As a single person, you are starting to feel lonely. You think to distract yourself by scrolling through social media but you are met with many upsetting articles and images. Your head starts to ache and your stomach starts to feel unsettled. Use the STOP strategy now. When you are ready to proceed, you decide that you need to talk to someone about how you're feeling. You look online and find the number for the In-Confidence helpline and you call.



References

¹Goldstein, Elisha *Uncovering Happiness: Overcoming Depression with Mindfulness and Self-Compassion*: University Press, 2015

Resources

For further information on mindfulness, check out these resources:

[5 Simple Mindfulness Practices for Daily Life](#)

[6 Mindfulness Exercises You Can Try Today](#)

[A Simple Mindful Gratitude Exercise](#)