

Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre

F O C U S

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Greater Happiness in 5 Minutes a Day

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....research demonstrates the incredible power of loving-kindness

Might be that sitting with your legs crossed repeating stuff like “May all beings be free from suffering,” is a little too far-out for you. I’m a scientist for crying out loud so you can imagine how I might feel meditating while surrounded by prominent neuroscientists, which I once did on a 7-day silent meditation retreat. Except that I actually didn’t feel silly. Because research demonstrates the incredible power of loving-kindness meditation: No need to be self-conscious when this stuff might be more effective than Prozac. Also called metta, loving-kindness meditation is the simple practice of directing well-wishes towards other people. Here’s how to do it. The general idea is to sit comfortably with your eyes closed, and imagine what you wish for your life. Formulate your desires into three or four phrase. Traditionally they would be something like this: *May I be healthy and strong. May I be happy. May I be filled with ease.*

Loving-kindness meditation is a simple repetition of these phrases, but directing them at different people. I do this with my kids before bed. We visualize together who we are directing the metta towards, and at first say something (*May you be happy*) and the kids repeat it after me. After a few repetitions, we start saying them in unison. The phrases we use are “*May you be healthy and strong. May you be happy. May you be at peace.*”

1. Start with by directing the phrases at yourself: *May I be happy.*
2. Next, direct the metta towards someone you feel thankful for or someone who has helped you.
3. Now visualize someone you feel neutral about—people you neither like or dislike. This one can be harder than you think: Makes me realize how quick we can be to judge people as either positive or negative in our lives.

4. Ironically, the next one can be easier: visualizing the people you don’t like or who you are having a hard time with. Kids who are being teased or bullied at school often feel quite empowered when they send love to the people making them miserable.
5. Finally, direct the metta towards everyone universally: “*May all beings everywhere be happy.*”

Loving-kindness meditation does far more than produce momentary good feelings. Over a nine week period, research showed that this type of meditation increased people’s experiences of positive emotions. (If you are working on improving your ratio of positive to negative emotions, start with metta!) The research shows compellingly that it actually puts people on “trajectories of growth,” leaving them better able to ward off depression and “become even more

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(continued from page one) satisfied with life.” This is probably because it increases a wide range of those resources that make for a meaningful and successful life, like having an increased sense of purpose, stronger social support, and less illness. Research even shows that loving-kindness meditation “changes the way people approach life” for the better. Social connections are important for health and happiness. Doing a simple loving-kindness meditation can make us feel less isolat-

ed and more connected to those around us: one study showed that a single seven minute loving-kindness meditation made people feel more connected to and positive about both loved ones and total strangers, *and* more accepting of themselves. Imagine what regular practice could do!

Source: Christine Carter. Greater Good The Science of a Meaningful Life, September 10, 2012, The Main Dish.



Kiddo Knows Best

Sometimes it's cute when kids act self-centered. Yet parenting styles can make the difference between a confident child and a narcissistic nightmare, psychologists at the University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University in Netherlands concluded from the first longitudinal study on the origins of intense feelings of superiority in children. Two prominent but nearly opposing schools of thought address how narcissism develops. The first attributes extreme self-love to a lack of affection from parents; the other implicates moms and dads who place their children on a pedestal by lavishing them with praise. Over the course of 18 months, 565 kids aged seven through 11 took multiple surveys designed to measure self-esteem, narcissism and their parents' warmth, answering questions about how much they identify with statements such as “kids like me deserve something extra.” The parents filled out reciprocal surveys about their approach to child rearing. In a March issue of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*

USA, the Dutch researchers report that children of excessively praising parents were more likely to score high on narcissistic qualities but not on self-esteem. They also found that lack of parental warmth showed no such link to narcissism. The correlation shows that positive feedback should be tied to good behavior in a child rather than piled on indiscriminately, says psychologist Luke Hyde of the University of Michigan, who did not participate in the work. A 2008 meta-analysis of 85 studies showed that narcissism is on the rise in young adults in the West, which could stem in part from a cultural emphasis on praise with the goal of boosting high self-esteem, notes Eddie Brummelman, lead author of the *PNAS* paper. “It might be well intended,” he adds, “but it actually backfires.” Such results support the praise-centric school of thought on narcissistic origins, although other scientists in the field point out that controversy still remains over the definition of narcissism itself. Brummelman

and his colleagues considered narcissistic personality traits (such as the desire for admiration), not narcissistic personality disorder (characterized by an impairment of daily functioning), in their study because clinicians are discouraged from diagnosing the disorder in youth—no one knows at what age the full-blown psychiatric condition sets in.

Source: Andrea Alfano, *Scientific American*, June 2015, p.25.

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WINTER

What are the Best and Worst Ways to Prepare for an Exam?

Daniel Willingham, a professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and author of *Raising Kids Who Read: What Parents Can Do*, responds: *So glad you asked!* Scientists have a lot of practical information on this topic, but most students do not know about it. Research investigating how students learn was first conducted at highly competitive institutions such as the University of California, Los Angeles. Even student at these top schools used terrible strategies. For example, students commonly highlight what they read, but research shows that does not help memory. Most students highlight as they are reading a text for the first time, when they do not know what is important enough to highlight. Another ineffective comprehension method is rereading. Doing so makes the student feel he or she is getting to know the material

better and better. Rereading is like someone explaining the same thing repeatedly. It all makes sense, so you say, “Yes, yes, got it.” but reviewing an explanation is not the same as being able to explain something yourself. The flaw in rereading—you fail to know you have learned the material—points to our first good study technique: self-testing. Self-testing may involve flash cards, it may mean answering questions at the back of the book chapter or it may be fielding questions lobbed by a study buddy. There are two main benefits to self-testing. First, in contrast to rereading, self-testing offers an accurate assessment of what has been learned and whether one needs to keep studying. Second, scores of studies show that self-testing is a great way to cement material into memory. It is even better than equivalent time spent pe-

using the material. Another useful technique is to periodically pause when reading to ask why a statement in the text is true. We have all had the experience of passing our eyes over words but not really thinking about what we have read. Pausing every few paragraphs to ask, “Why does that make sense?” prompts thinking and learning. A third technique is to spread out study sessions instead of cramming. Much research shows that memory is more enduring when material is reviewed days or even weeks apart. This is a practice that teachers can promote by giving more frequent assignments and quizzes that require a review of material covered earlier in the course. Even brief memory refreshers can result in big returns in learning.

Source: Lola Irele, London. *Scientific American Mind*, July/August 2015.

5 Ways to Care for Yourself While Caring for a Loved One

Caring for an aging parent or loved one who is ill or disabled is often deeply rewarding. But it can also consume a lot of time, as well as physical and emotional energy. You may feel overwhelmed by myriad of responsibilities—home, work, other family needs, and caregiving. But it’s just as important to care for yourself before you burn out. Try these five tips to help rejuvenate yourself. **Recruit help:** You don’t have to “do it all” yourself. In fact, it’s best to have more than one person involved in caregiving. Whether it’s accompanying your loved one to appointments, helping with housework, or cooking dinner one night a week, ask other

family members to lend a hand. And if someone asks if he or she can pitch in, don’t be afraid to say yes! **Quell guilt:** At times, you may feel like there’s something more you should be doing, or something you should have done differently. Rather than ruminate on what could or should be, give yourself credit for all that you do. If feelings of guilt are especially strong, it can help to talk them over with a counselor or social worker. **Stay active:** Frequent exercise delivers proven health benefits, such as lowering cholesterol, and blood pressure—and it can be a powerful energy and mood lifter, too. Try to get 30 to 60

minutes of exercise on most days of the week. **Stay connected:** Catch up with friends by phone or email, or plan weekly walks or a regular lunch or movie. Ask people to drop by and visit so that you can take a break and feel connected with the world outside your caregiver role. **Relax and enjoy yourself:** Listen to music, take a bubble bath, dabble in creative pastimes, or even splurge on a massage. You can also learn meditation, yoga, or other relaxation techniques through a class, tape, or book.

Source: HEALTHbeat, *Caregivers Handbook*, Harvard Medical School,

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We offer the very best in psychological and counseling services.

Established in 2008, our staff is committed to helping you achieve greater emotional wellness and adjustment through individual, child/adolescent, couples, family, and group therapy.

We are available to you Monday thru Saturday with day and evening hours for your convenience.

Get Over It

What's the difference between trying and doing? "Each is a valuable state of mind, but often times we confuse the two," says Bernard Roth, author of *The Achievement Habit: Stop Wishing, Start Doing, and Take Command of Your Life*. "In a 'trying' mindset, you may set a goal and accomplish it with no problem; however, if you encounter obstacles, you're likely to be easily defeated. In a 'doing' mindset, you find a way around those obstacles no matter what. The difficulty is when we tell ourselves we're in a doing mindset and we're not."

What prevents us from achieving our goals? "The simple answer is reasons. You have to have reasons in life to be a reasonable person, but they get in the way when you use them to let yourself off the hook. They become excus-

es. You end up putting boundaries around yourself and blaming everyone else for why they're there. Achievement is about personal responsibility—being honest with yourself, identifying your intentions, and giving them the necessary attention." **Where should I start?** "Be aware of how you use reasons to justify your behavior. Next, practice not using them. For example, simply telling someone you won't be able to attend an event and leaving it at that. By abandoning reasons, or excuses, you become more mindful of your actions, thus empowering yourself to set realistic goals and achieve them." **Anything else I can do?** "Watch your language. Use 'I won't' instead of 'I can't' because usually that's the truth. Replace the 'but' with 'and.' these small changes will help you

reframe the way you look at things you perceive as blocking you."

For more tip, check out theachievementhabit.com

Source: August 2015 **SOUTHWEST, WORK/Solution**.

