

Wellness and Resilience Strategies: Mind

Section 8



“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” – Audre Lorde

“Radical Reflection: You are not your thoughts! That said, avoiding your thoughts will not help you train your brain to think new ones. You must look at them with gentle kindness and say, “Thank you for sharing.” And with love, release them.” – Sonya Renee Taylor

Sections 8-11 build upon a model called the Wellness Compass developed by the Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation. The symbols this model uses are cross-cultural, iconic, and connect us to our common humanity. A tool generated over 2000 years ago by the Han Dynasty, a compass shows us the way when we feel lost, while the use of four colors speaks to the wisdom encompassed in the medicine wheel, used by many Native American cultures to guide the development of a balanced life. The four sectors of the compass mode – Mind, Spirit, Strength, and Heart – not only contribute to our overall wellness, but also provide guidance on strategies to help build our compassion resilience. Before delving in further, you may want to take a [self-assessment](#) of your current wellness practices (attached). Hold onto this and notice any that you marked as “this never occurred to me” as you encounter the next four sections of the toolkit.



Mind is the first sector we will explore. Participants discover the impact of organization, meaningful work, and being present on well-being. Mindfulness is a contemplative practice of being intentionally aware in the present moment. Mindfulness will be a key skill used in many of the Mind Section activities as well as those that follow (Spirit, Strength, and Heart).



[The practice of mindfulness is displayed in this brief, animated video.](#) The goal of mindfulness is to be fully present with our emotions (HEART), with others (HEART), with our bodies (STRENGTH), with our environment (MIND), and with the universe (SPIRIT);¹ therefore, mindfulness is a key skill that will form a foundation for building our compassion resilience in all four sectors of the wellness compass. It is through being fully present and aware and observing mindfully that we can participate most effectively in building our own resilience and wellness. A lot of mindfulness practices involve using an anchor, such as breathing, as a way to turn attention back to the present moment. In this [4-minute video](#), children show how a focus on breathing can be a helpful strategy for both adults and children. While the breath is a good anchor for many, it is not the best for everyone. Some use a focus on feeling their feet on the ground, others touch their thumb and index fingers together forming a circle, and there are many other ways to anchor ourselves.

Mindfulness is not only a mechanism to sharpen our attention, but is also a means of strengthening our compassion and empathy. Specifically, mindfulness is associated with increased self-compassion, higher compassion resilience, and lower compassion fatigue.¹

¹ Thieleman, K., & Cacciatore, J. (2014). *Witness to suffering: Mindfulness and compassion fatigue among traumatic bereavement volunteers and professionals.* *Soc Work, 59(1), 24-41.*

Developed in partnership with:



compassionresiliencetoolkit.org

How the practice of mindfulness can help build resilience in the Mind area of the wellness compass:

This area of wellness has to do with how we manage our time, workspace, and belongings. Let's pretend that Mary, a zealot in her first year of nursing who volunteers at every opportunity, is starting to feel overcommitted and over-scheduled. One week, Mary takes some extra shifts, is late to a care meeting, and begins to feel strapped for time to dedicate to her daily documentation work. Mary, ever attentive of when her life feels out of balance, notices how her tendency to say "yes" to everything makes it difficult to give her all to the things she has agreed to do. Rather than engage in self-blame (a form of judgment), Mary accepts that she cannot reasonably (and with compassion) do everything asked of her. She identifies the areas of her job where she has the freedom to say "no" and she vows to only say "yes" to opportunities that most reflect her interests and values.

Learning to say "no" compassionately (see compassionate boundaries section 6) especially in a profession or work culture where we might be expected to say "yes" (see expectations section 5), is imperative to maintaining resilience in this sector of the compass.

If you struggle with taking on too much, you may benefit from [learning more about the benefits](#) of saying "no" and how to do so compassionately.

It is likely not news to anyone that living and working in an environment that is organized to support our activities and offers visuals or space that are calming adds to our overall well-being. Reflect on the following questions regarding your current level of organization:

1. In what area of your life are you most easily organized? (finances, belongings, workspace, connecting to friends and family, cleaning your living area, scheduling your time, etc.)
2. In what area do you find to be the most challenging to be organized?
3. When you recognize a need for organization do you tend to use negative self-talk to try to motivate yourself or ask yourself what supports or skills might be helpful to you?

4. Our self-expectations can become unrealistic when it comes to how we approach getting more organized in areas that are a challenge. What step might you take to organize the part of your life that you listed in #2? (example: I want to recognize my family's birthdays. Do I start by figuring out how I can follow-through on sending a happy birthday texts to my siblings or do I expect that I buy and send birthday cards to everyone in my extended family?)

To learn more about how to "organize your brain, your time, your workspace, and your projects," check out the [following blog](#).

The mind area of the wellness compass also suggests that we have a strong need to do meaningful work that engages our individual gifts and skills. In "Mindsets," Dr. Carol Dweck (2016) shows that it is not just our abilities and talents that bring us success as providers, but whether we approach our work with a fixed or growth mindset. People with *fixed mindsets* believe qualities are etched in stone and that abilities are fixed. This mindset often leads to people feeling deficient or incompetent when faced with difficult situations. When we feel a lack of competence, we may retreat from the challenge before us and become judgmental. For example, in a fixed mindset, if we are challenged by the complex needs of a client that we do not feel competent to address, we may retreat from engagement with that client. In the process, we might blame ourselves and/or the client. Thus, our lack of a sense of competence can leave us in a place of compassion fatigue for that client.

In contrast, people with a *growth mindset* believe that abilities can be developed through practice and effort. Our skills and talents are not predetermined; therefore, people with growth mindsets stretch themselves to learn new things and believe themselves capable of learning through experience. These people are more resilient in the face of setbacks. In a growth mindset, if we experience compassion fatigue, we may view it as an opportunity to grow our compassion resilience.

Wellness and Resilience Strategies: Mind

Section 8

Finding a level of competence in the face of complex challenges is tough! We benefit from understanding our own growth potential; but we also benefit from understanding the resilience and strengths of those we serve and those with whom we work. None of us are the sole source of connection, support, or well-being for a client, family or colleague. All clients, families, and colleagues have internal strengths that can be accessed to move them closer to the lives they desire. Many of the activities in this section invite us to recognize our own strengths and competencies and to celebrate the skills and strengths of those with whom we work.



Wellness and Resilience Strategies – Spirit