



The four sectors of the compass model - 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 if you weren't able to in Section 2. This assessment is meant to provide you with insight into your wellness practices and perhaps give some suggestions on additional things you can try.



The Benefits of Mindfulness

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) (Davidson, 2012); 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, 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 (Thielman & Cacciatore, 2014).

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Our Interpretation of Stress

Stress is a normal aspect of life that we all feel and experience at times. Our bodies have many ways to send us signals that things are out of balance. Learning to be attuned to our body so we pick up on the clues is a key skill needed to become stress resilient.

Our body sends warning signs when we are under stress. Some [physical or emotional responses](#) might include muscle tension, eating too much or too little, anger, irritability, insomnia, headaches, or a general lack of focus. Practicing mindfulness helps us to recognize these signs.

There are three questions to ask ourselves when our body is sending us those signals. First, ask ourselves “is it possible for me to avoid this situation right now?” While that often sounds like an easy yes or no answer, many people continue in situations that lead to high levels of stress and do not or cannot make the choice to walk away. If avoiding the cause of stress is not applicable, move to asking ourselves, “what might be another way of thinking about this situation?” Switching our perspective could help us to embrace any positives related to the stressor. This too can sound easy, yet it requires willingness to give up the narrative that we have developed about the situation. In case you didn’t get a chance to view the TED Talk by Kelly McGonigal shared last session on making stress our friend, [here it is again](#).

Finally, if we can neither avoid the situation nor change our perspective in a way that in turn reduces any negative impact of the stress, adjusting our lifestyle may be beneficial. Ask ourselves, “what changes could I make to my lifestyle that could help minimize the impact of the stress I am feeling?”

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a therapeutic approach that can inform our understanding of stress resilience and provide one example of a way to minimize the impact of the stress we are feeling. One aspect of ACT that is particularly relevant is the emphasis on acceptance. By mindfully accepting a feeling or thought, we allow ourselves to feel the pain, naming it for what it is (“this is stress” or “this hurts”) without trying to change it in that moment. This gives us a bit of space needed to relate more positively to the stress. The practice of listening to and accepting the signs our body sends are important in our ability to be stress resilient.

The Role of Relationships

Humans were made for [connections and relationships](#) to others. Research has shown both the positive outcomes for our overall health when we feel connected to others and the decline in connectedness in America in the past 30 years.

Brené Brown, a researcher who studies courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy, says this about human connection: *“A deep sense of love and belonging is an irresistible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.”*



Strong emotional health supports strong relationships and is very important to our overall wellbeing. Being able to stay present and centered even in the midst of difficult circumstances allows us to be thoughtfully responsive rather than impulsively reactive. We seek to have our emotions serve our wellbeing rather than for our emotions to overwhelm us.

Being mindfully aware of our emotions is not only valuable to our connection to those around us, but to ourselves as well. A healthy relationship with oneself is demonstrated by [being self-compassionate](#). Self-compassion involves supporting and soothing ourselves when we are struggling, just as we would for a dear friend in a similar situation. Dr. Kristin Neff researches self-compassion and has found [three elements of self-compassion](#):

1. **Be kind to yourself versus judging yourself.**
2. **Recognize your common humanity, versus isolating yourself.**
3. **Be mindful about your emotions versus over identifying with them.**

The Integration of our Values

Our sense of purpose provides direction to where we focus our energy, passion, and growth. When we live our life in alignment with our core values, we have a strong sense of purpose. Being able to articulate our core values and our sense of purpose helps guide the choices we make. In our role as caregivers, it is helpful to have a daily reminder of our overall goals as a caregiver. This helps us see the daily trials and joys of caring for others as part of the bigger picture, sometimes offering perspective and other times offering self-compassion.