

FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

NEWSLETTER



MINDFULNESS TO SUPPORT PARENTS AND CHILDREN



*Clare Grace Jones
Director of
Training/Technical
Assistance for FIRST Steps
Together*

Recently I was on a Zoom call with many of you. It had been a difficult morning for me, and the day ahead was packed full of leading meetings and supporting others, both at work and at home. At the end of the meeting I asked if someone would lead us in a brief closing. I am so thankful that Patrick (see his article in this issue on the wellness group he facilitates) volunteered Ilana, a clinician from CHD Pittsfield! She invited everyone to close their eyes and led us through a three minute relaxation exercise that brought my focus internally to my breathing, then to how my body was hunched over, and finally to fishing out thoughts of gratitude from the anxiety that was holding me in its grip. Stopping to take that 3 minutes reset my whole day. My concerns were still very real, but I felt like my ability to stop and breathe, even for just a few minutes, helped me operate for the rest of the afternoon from a “zone of calm.” During our current circumstances, it feels more important than ever to share resources around how we can tend to our own wellness as well as how to support parents and their children to do the same.

Below are a few of my favorite resources for being mindful, processing feelings, and regulating during this time. You will find lots of other resources throughout this month’s newsletter. Also, look for a follow up post on Basecamp to share your own ideas on what is working for you!

Resources for me:

[Hand in Hand Parenting](#)
[What Is A Listening Partnership](#)
[And Why Do I Need One?](#)

[TED Talk with Andy Puddicombe](#)
[All It Takes is 10 Mindful Minutes](#)

[Positive Parenting Connection](#)
[20 Calm Down Tip sfor Parents](#)

Resources for my kiddo:

[Moovlee Calming Exercises for Kids:](#)
[Breathing and Stretching](#)

[PBS Learning](#)
[Daniel Tiger:](#)
[Managing and](#)
[Expressing](#)
[Feelings](#)



Turn it Around and Find
Something Good: Strategy
Song and Activity | Daniel
Daniel Tiger and his friends
have all had sad experiences
with a raind...

MINDFULNESS

What is mindfulness? Mindfulness is the ability for a person to be fully present in the moment without judgment; to be able to recognize what you're doing, where you are, while refraining from being reactive. All too often in today's hectic world, we find ourselves going in several directions in a form of controlled chaos. This rapid paced, constantly multitasking lifestyle can place several physical and mental stressors both on our bodies. To alleviate these stressors, I have found mindfulness exercises to be very effective in recentering my focus and to rechanneling my efforts. There are several generally accepted mindfulness exercises, but I believe you need to find what works for you as an individual. For example, I find meditation, breathing exercises, short walks, yoga and physical exercise to be what is most effective for myself.



When I first started practicing mindfulness meditation, I found myself confusing mindfulness with meditation. I had this vision of being in a state of universal harmony, being completely at peace with my environment. However, what I discovered was I would often drift off and become focused on negative thoughts. It took a lot of practice to truly relax, allow negative energy to dissipate, and remain neutral to recenter myself.

As a therapist, utilizing mindfulness when working with clients is essential to decreasing their hypervigilance and anxiety. During a session, I will normalize anxiety and conduct a breathing or grounding exercise as a way to encourage clients to effectively self-regulate and manage during stressful times. I think now, more than ever, it is even more important to practice. As we deal with the global impact of COVID-19 and its complexity and uncertainty, mindfulness can be an effective way to regulate, offer insight and build resiliency during this challenging period.

I follow many practitioners, but my favorite is [Thich Nhat Hanh](#). He is a Zen Master and Buddhist Monk who describes mindfulness as bringing our mind to the present moment. He suggests the practice of daily meditation, mindful conscious eating, walking, driving and listening. According to Thich Nhat Hanh "The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers." Below is a sample of a quick breathing exercise that he finds very effective.

***Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.
Breathing in, I notice that my in-breath has become deeper.
Breathing out, I notice that my out-breath has become slower.
Breathing in, I calm myself.
Breathing out, I feel at ease.
Breathing in, I smile.
Breathing out, I release.
Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.
Breathing out, I feel it is a wonderful moment.***



Elizabeth Kelley, MSW, LCSW, CADC
Clinician
Center for Human Development

APPROACHING AND NAVIGATING VIRTUAL VISITS

Are you missing the 15-30 minute drive in between visits to regulate yourself and review your plan for the next visit? How can we mentally prepare for our visits in a few minutes, and navigate our way through them while meeting both the parent's and child's needs, all over a computer screen? Our FIRST Steps Together team at Making Opportunity Count, Inc. (MOC) in Fitchburg has some ideas. Below are their tips for approaching and navigating virtual visits to meet both parent's and child's emotional and attentional needs.

Before the session:

- The day before a session, send a screenshot of the materials a parent will need for a planned activity. Make sure you also have everything ready for the activity as well
- Prepare a list of online meetings to share with parents; review their [Wellness Recovery Action Plan](#) or make changes to reflect current circumstances; plan to remind them of hotline numbers
- Find an area in your house that is private, and alert people in your household you need uninterrupted time
- Practice mindful self-regulation before logging on to a call. Deep breathing, imagining a safe place, aromatherapy, listening to an inspiring song are suggestions. Our appearance of self-regulation can immediately have a calming effect on our families

During the session:

- Check in each visit to assess family's basic needs. If they are struggling, strategize ways to connect with community resources. Keep in mind [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#), especially the first three: physiological, safety, and love and belonging needs. You may have planned a creative parent-child activity, but if the family doesn't have adequate food to eat, they may not be able to fully engage in the activity
- Watch for cues from parent about what the child needs. If child is fussy or has elevated energy for instance, let parent know you will stand by if/when they tend to child's needs. Ask parent if you can interact with child. Have a song or story or puppet ready to engage with child. If parent needs to end the call, be flexible and accommodating
- Suggest to parent that since routine is especially important at this time, you will schedule sessions with them at the same time every week

After the session:

- Take a deep breath and make notes for service log, supervision and any needed follow up



From MOC FIRST Steps Together: Maria Rader, Clinician with Alvina Duffy and Shannon Dinardo, Family Recovery Support Specialists



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

PARENT-CHILD CENTERING ACTIVITIES

Sometimes when we begin a visit, we notice our participant is eager to tell us about their week or share a pressing concern or crisis. At the same time, their little ones may be excited to see you, fussy or just completely all over the place. Is this a familiar scenario? The two-year-old that wants everyone's attention, so they are tearing the house apart and mom just wants them to calm down for a minute so she can talk to you? This can feel overwhelming for everyone, including us.

One tool we can use to help both mom and child feel regulated and ready to start the visit is to begin with a parent-child activity. This may seem challenging in our new "virtual" world but, with a little planning, we can bring these activities to the virtual visit.

Activities can be as simple as reading a book or coloring together. And, here are some ideas for activities based on age that can easily be done with items from around the house.



Erica Napolitan
Program Specialist

0 - 6
MONTHS



5s Method: Watch this video from St. Louis Children's Hospital on using the 5 s method to soothe a baby

Tracking: With your baby lying on their back, hold a toy in front of their face and wiggle it slowly or gently touch to get attention. Then move the toy from side to side, and encourage to follow along with their eyes



6 - 12
MONTHS



Stacking: Take turns stacking the cups and knocking down. This can develop the understanding of cause and effect, fine motor skills

Clap with Me: Encourage clapping with this fun rhyming game

Clap, clap, one, two, three
Clap, clap, clap with me
Clap, clap, four and five
Clap, clap, clap, bees in hive
Clap, clap, six, seven, eight
Clap, clap, clap, you are great
Clap, clap, nine and ten

1
YEAR

Fetch Items: Send your child on different "errands" around the house to get shoes, bring you the ball, or find the cup. This practices language skills by following directions



Tube Talk: Talk through a cardboard tube and see how your baby responds to the change in your voice. Language is really about imitating sounds

2 - 3
YEARS



Drawing Songs: As you sing one of your child's favorite songs, draw a picture together of what is happening in the lyrics

Initiate Conversation: Give a doll or plush toy and encourage your child to talk to it, hold it and take care of it. This teaches creativity and imagination

Find more ideas here:

[0 - 6 Months](#) | [6 - 12 Months](#) | [1 Year](#) | [2 - 3 Years](#) | [3 - 4 Years](#) | [5 Years](#)

WELLNESS GROUP



Armed with little other than our coffees, workbooks and check-ins for the past week, we set out on a journey. Only one rule, besides The Golden Rule. Members (group participants) decide where

this time takes us. Whether as a group, or individually, a goal is as much about the journey as it is about the milestone. One that involves the process of guiding one's own thoughts, behaviors, and feelings to reach these goals. Along the way, as with any journey, there will be setbacks, hardships, frustrations, exhaustion and hopefully, at last, jubilation.

Members most often already function with the weight of the world on their shoulders. They have multiple demands made by many different people and agencies. We aim for the members to become the primary contributors to their own betterment, life and recovery. This can create immense confidence, where there once was none. Many life changes must take place. Through the Wellness Workbook, we begin to look at what makes each of us tick, alike, yet unique. Why so many of us struggled as children with behavior and negative influences that carried over into adulthood. Why many still struggle with impulse control and the management of short-term wants and desires.

The workbook is divided into sections, all similar, yet essential to achieving WELLNESS. Many times during the workbook creation, I would delve back into my college days. I recalled, with rose-colored glasses, my psychology professor and the story he would "often" (almost weekly!) tell of the Rubicon model. A tale of Caesar's crossing the Rubicon River, a point of no return, thereby revealing his intentions. According to the Rubicon model of action phases, every action includes such a point of no return, at which the individual moves from goal setting to goal striving. That's

just exactly what we are doing with Wellness Group. Participants are utilizing this group, learning about themselves through the workbook pages, while also forming cohesion with one another and creating bonds through our discussions. Members develop their own individualized goals of wellness to combat the many problematic symptoms of depression, substance use disorder and social anxieties. This group offers relief because of its members, not the room or building where it is taking place. Many participants bond with one another, some showing socially empathetic emotions for the first time in a long time due to this group experience. Wellness is different for each one of us. One person may like to take walks, while another might like loud music. In the process, something magical happens. Patterns of expression, eating habits, and clothing attire all seem to regulate along the path of this journey.

Wellness isn't just a state that you reach after finishing rehab. It's a continually evolving process of self-discovery, and growth that will continue long after you finish the first phases of treatment. Wellness is a process of making positive choices that contribute to your overall health:

Choosing foods that nourish your body and give you energy.

Getting exercise that strengthens and fulfills you.

Participating in social activities that give your life meaning.

Practicing mindfulness in everyday living.

While addiction is a path of self-destruction, recovery is a process of self-realization and transformation.

Patrick Tuohy
Family Recovery Support Specialist
Center for Human Development, Pittsfield

YOGA FOR MIND-BODY REGULATION

Diane Ogunlade, FRSS, recently led a fabulous virtual yoga session for the FIRST Steps Together community on Zoom. Below she shares how and why she finds yoga to be a good tool for mind-body regulation.

To make a long story short, my internal world--once a place of refuge, curiosity and imagination--became a dark and scary place I no longer derived joy from. There was little to no peace. My inner voice, once playful, soothing, and reflective, became mean, fearful, and very critical. I was at war with myself, but as a young person, I didn't understand all this. All I knew was that I felt really bad and angry most of the time.

I was disconnected in every way. Mind from Spirit, Body from Soul. And what does one do when they can't go "in" to find peace? They seek outside of themselves for solace, pleasure.

Fast-forward, I tried multiple methods for healing and recovery. Not all were beneficial, but all came with their own lessons. It was probably about 15 years ago, during an in-patient stint, that I was introduced to yoga and meditation. No, I wasn't miraculously healed at once, but what I did have was an unforgettable experience during a progressive muscle relaxation meditation.

I haven't always been consistent over the years. But there is no denying the sense of peace, well-being and inner strength I feel well up during and after my yoga or meditation practices. That nasty, critical voice becomes silenced and I feel connected, in all the ways, and my inner world is once again a refuge.

The trick is, and continues to be, how to stay in that state longer, once the practice is over. This is one reason I love that yoga is called a practice. And just as anything else in life, the more we practice, the better we master the skill.



Diane Ogunlade, Family Recovery Support Specialist (FRSS) from Cape Cod Children's Place demonstrates Tree Pose

RESOURCES TO REDUCE STRESS

Ilana Ackerman, MSW, is the clinician at the Center for Human Development, Pittsfield site. She recommended some resources to reduce stress and anxiety during these times.

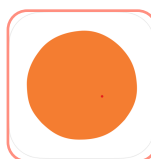
She notes many articles recommend you do these every day:

- exercise for at least 30 minutes
- drink 8 cups of water
- sleep between 7-9 hours
- make sure to call at least one friend or family member each day

Apps that can be downloaded on your phone:



Breathe: Meditation & Sleep: examples include Reducing Coronavirus Anxiety (10 minutes of meditation), Reboot Your Focus (9 minutes of meditation)



Headspace: Meditation & Sleep Reducing stress, anxiety through a guide to everyday mindfulness in just a few minutes a day



Down Dog: Yoga for any level, length of time and with or without music. Free for a limited time

NEW ENGLAND SCHOOL OF ADDICTION AND PREVENTION STUDIES

The [New England School of Addiction and Prevention Studies](#), commonly called Summer School, is a 4-day intensive learning experience to further knowledge, skills, and experience in the field of substance use disorder services. 2020 Summer School "2020 Summer School Reimagined" is offered virtually June 1 - 4, 2020.

NEW ENGLAND
SUMMER SCHOOL OF

ADDICTION STUDIES

ADCare | EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTE INC

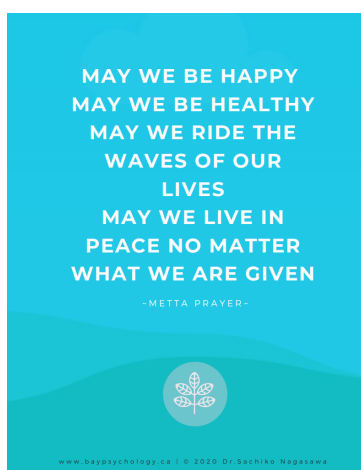
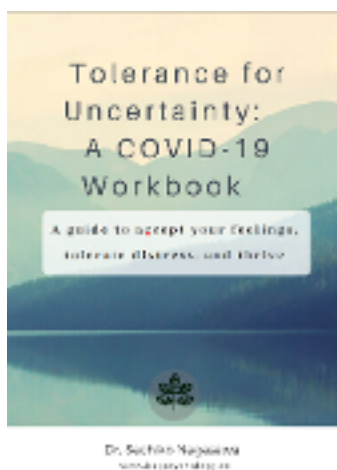
ATTACHMENT, REGULATION AND COMPETENCY (ARC)



Attachment - Regulation - Competency

ARC-At-A-Glance: Modular Videos: The Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) Framework is a flexible, components-based intervention developed for children and adolescents who have experienced complex trauma, along with their caregiving systems. ARC has created "ARC lite": a series of free, remote, brief videos that will give an overview of key ARC concepts, and comment on these concepts as they relate to working and coping in the midst of this pandemic.

TOLERANCE FOR UNCERTAINTY: A COVID-19 WORKBOOK



Dr. Sachiko Nagasawa, a psychologist in Canada, created this [workbook](#) containing information and practical skills to help you to thrive through uncertainty. Learn to accept your feelings, tolerate distress and move forward with grace despite not knowing what lies ahead. Topics include understanding emotional distress, wellness planning and self compassion.

RAPID RESPONSE VIRTUAL HOME VISITING

Parents as Teachers National Center

[COVID-19 Response: Keeping Families Virtually Connected to Home Visiting](#)

During this unprecedented COVID-19 public health crisis, leaders in the national home visiting field have formed a rapid response collaborative to create and support the dissemination of free resources on virtual family interactions for home visitors. The resources include:

- free access to ALL modules for all home visiting professionals
 - weekly webinars every Wednesday at 2:00 pm CST
 - webinar and content archive at the [HV-RRC Website](#)
 - resources on virtual interactions with families and best practices in telehealth activities
- [Download the HV-RRC one-pager](#)



CO-REGULATION FROM BIRTH THROUGH YOUNG ADULTHOOD: A PRACTICE BRIEF

From the [Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)

[Co-Regulation From Birth Through Young Adulthood: A Practice Brief](#)

Co-Regulation for Young Children

In Infancy:

- Provide warmth and nurturing
- Anticipate needs and respond to cues
- Provide structure and consistent routine
- Provide physical and emotional comfort when child is distressed or dysregulated: speak calmly and give affection
- Modify the environment to decrease demands and stress

In toddlerhood, in addition to above:

- Teach age-appropriate rules and expectations
- Label emotions; teach and coach use of words to express emotions
- Model waiting and self-calming strategies
- Redirect child attention to regulate behavior

In preschool-aged children, in addition to above:

- Teach and coach identification of solutions to simple problems
- Coach and incentivize rule-following and task completion
- Model, prompt, and reinforce self-calming strategies like taking a deep breath
- Provide external structure for calming down, including a calm-down space and materials
- Provide clear and consistent consequences, carried out in firm yet calm manner

How to Co-Regulate



Mind Full, or Mindful?



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mass.gov/first-steps-together

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Caring for Generations
JF&CS
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LIVE AND RECORDED WEBINARS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- May 5 **Health Resources in Action:** [Working with People Who Use Stimulants](#)
- May 6 **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Caring for Each Other: How to Use Sesame Street in Communities Resources on Offering Comfort with Families Now](#)
- May 7 **Health Resources in Action:** [Overdose Rescue and Harm Reduction](#)
- May 12 **Health Resources in Action:** [Supervising Staff in Times of Crisis](#)
- May 13 **Brazelton Touchpoints:** [Mindful Self-Compassion: Heart Skills for Our Families and Ourselves in Challenging Times](#)
- June 25 **The Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:** [Culture, Identity, History as Sources of Strength and Resilience for African American Children and Families](#)
- July 30 **The Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:** [Culture, Identity, History as Sources of Strength and Resilience for Latino Children and Families](#)

Recorded webinars, courses and other learning opportunities:

- **Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Improvement Network of Massachusetts (PNQIN) and the Betsy Lehman Center for Patient Safety:** [Past virtual town halls](#) for maternal health care professionals confronting the challenges of COVID-19
- **The Ounce:** [Achieve OnDemand](#), trainings designed specifically with the needs of home visitors and supervisors in mind
- **The Institute for Family Support Professionals:** Offering Family Support Professionals the opportunity to learn new skills and grow their careers, including [COVID-19 Response: Keeping Families Virtually Connected to Home Visiting](#)
- **Children's Trust:** [Online Resources For Family Support Professionals](#) and [free acces to the digital, evidence-based parenting resource, All Babies Cry](#)
- **Children and Family Futures:** [Trauma-Informed Care for Families Affected by Substance Use Disorders](#) and [Two Part Webinar Series: Strengthening the Ties that Bind](#)
- **National Hispanic and Latino ATTC:** [Intersection of Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence and Addiction](#)
- **National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health:** [Supporting Survivors' Access to Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health Services During the COVID-19 Emergency](#)
- **Relationships Matter! Series (developed for SAMHSA by Advocates for Human Potential):** [Complex Connections: Intimate Partner Violence and Women's Substance Abuse and Recovery](#); [Motherhood: What it Means for Women's Recovery](#)
- **Children's HealthWatch:** [Immigration & Equity Webinar](#)
- **NCTSN:** [Health Care Toolbox - Addressing the Psychological and Emotional Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Children, Families, and Healthcare Staff](#)
- **The Center for Early Childhood Mental Health:** [Introduction to the Best Practice Tutorial Series, 10 modules](#)
- **SAMHSA:** [Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, podcasts and webinars](#)
- **GPS:** Intro to Bringing Your Support Group Online, [All the basics and tips on how to lead successful online support groups](#)

[Thank you to the Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative Resource Digest for sharing resources](#)