

Got Mindfulness? There's an App for That!

One of my favorite definitions of mindfulness comes from Joh Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. He defines mindfulness as “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” Another way of thinking about mindfulness is that it is the opposite of multi-tasking. Oftentimes, our minds are either reliving the events of the day or anticipating what will happen tomorrow, thus missing out on what is happening in the present.

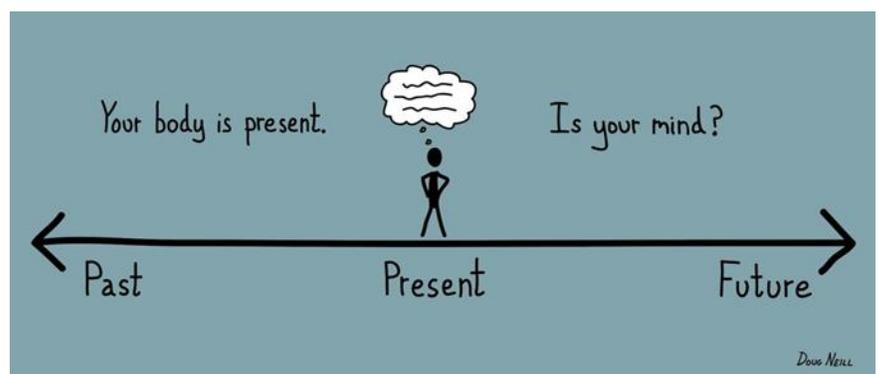
I think many of us struggle with being mindful, especially in the CAC world. It is especially important for us who work with children and families who have experience trauma to master this important skill. I wonder why is it so hard for us to be mindful?

Is it because we live in a culture that values multi-tasking? Many of us have and do work in agencies which value the person who can juggle the most balls. Is it because many professionals who work in CACs wear multiple hats? You might be providing support to a non-offending caregiver, yet your mind wanders to the grant report that is due by close of business. Or maybe you are interviewing a child and thinking about how your MDT partners will react because the child is not able to give enough detail.

Is it because in our work being present means bearing witness to emotional pain and suffering? It is hard to be in the presence of such suffering and maintain a professional demeanor so instead our thoughts go to what can we do to help this child/parent/family. It is easier to jump into action than to sit and bear witness.

Is it because we are constantly juggling the needs of the children and families we serve and the needs of our multidisciplinary partners? Sometimes those needs are conflicting and we are caught in the middle trying to meet everyone's needs.

Is it because when we leave the office we are plagued with thoughts of the client's stories we have heard that day, worry about funding to retain employees or even keep the doors of the CAC open, frustrations with the systems we collaborate with, guilt because we go home knowing there are children who are not safe in their own homes? We might even feel like we have to make ourselves available to our



clients and colleagues 24/7 because children’s lives are at stake. All of these thoughts and worries prevent us from being present with our own partners, children and family.

And forget the non-judgment part! We negatively judge ourselves for not working more hours, not working harder or smarter and not having enough emotional or physical energy left for our families.

Any of this sound familiar? So what do we do? How can we begin to pay attention on purpose?

Some suggested strategies:

- **Start and end your day with mindfulness meditation.** There are several apps that are available free or for very little cost. Download an app and start slowly. If you have never tried mindfulness meditation, start with 5 minutes and work your way up. See a list of apps at the end of this article.
- **Take short breaks during the day to regroup.** There is a great website to help with this, www.donothingfor2minutes.com. Everyone has at least two minutes a couple of times each day to stop and breathe!
- **Give yourself permission to leave work at work.** I heard someone say recently that professionals in the CAC world have an attitude of sacrifice. I believe that to be true and I do not believe that individuals who sacrifice their own health and well-being is an effective professional nor is it sustainable over the long haul. Additionally, it short changes our families when we are not fully present at home.
- **Be intentional.** When you are at home and find yourself thinking of work, intentionally redirect your thinking. Someone recently told me how they learned to leave work at the office. This person would notice when she was thinking of work outside of office hours. Then she would audibly say, “Not now!” She reported that it took much practice to master this skill, sometimes saying “Not now” hundreds of times in an hour.

When we develop the capacity to be pay attention on purpose, we are able to more fully embrace the rich rewards of walking with children and families on the road to hope and healing without losing ourselves or shortchanging our loved ones. If you have strategies that help sustain you in this work, please share with your colleagues! We need to have conversations and support each other on this journey.

Mindfulness Apps

Headspace	Free	Itunes	Free	Android
The Mindfulness App	\$2.99	Itunes	\$1.99	Android
Simply Being	\$1.99	Itunes	\$1.49	Android
Calm	Free	Itunes	Free	Android
Breathe2Relax	Free	Itunes	Free	Android
Take a Break	Free	Itunes	Free	Android