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Highest Heights Individual and Family Therapy

Newsletter

Greetings from Highest Heights!

The Highest Heights Individual and Family Therapy Newsletter includes helpful information and exercises to improve anxiety, distress, attention, mental clarity, well-being, emotional balance, and overall self-awareness.

In this first issue, you will find valuable and interesting information about breathing and the heart as well as useful exercises designed to build self-soothing and relaxation skills. Also find introductions to evidence-based mindful awareness practices that have been shown to be invaluable skills when facing stress, anxiety, depression, attention problems, and lots more!

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SELF-SOOTHING

Use your breath to change your heart

Did you know that your lungs and your heart are intimately tied together! The human body operates in such a way that different parts that seem independent often rely each other.

You can actually exploit this connection by controlling the breath in a certain way that will lead to the immediate decrease in heart rate. Practice the skills on the back of this newsletter to take back the control of your runaway heartbeat the next time it starts beating out of your chest as you enter a new situation, begin to argue with a loved one, or feel pressure to perform.

You always have the tools to practice these breathing skills (you never leave home without your heart and lungs!), so take advantage of them by constantly reminding yourself that they are there. Take an extra second after you wake up or before you get out of the car to notice that your body is still breathing and your heart is still beating for you.

MINDFULNESS

Bringing to mind...

One way to think of mindfulness is to sustain focused attention on one mental or physical object without distraction or judgment. Whether it be our breath, the sensations of our feet when we walk, the chaos of our racing thoughts, or the appreciation we have for our family; bringing different mental and physical objects to mind, steadily sustaining them, and viewing them non-judgmentally is a simple but difficult skill. Just try it: choose something to keep in the foreground of your mind without distractions (your breath is usually a good place to start) and for the next full minute simply sustain your attention on that one object. Ready? Go...

Was it easy? What did you notice about the way your mind handled that task? Were you able to keep your attention *purely and truly* focused on that one object without any distractions? If you felt you were able to, you are extremely unusual!

Don't be hard on yourself if you even had tremendous trouble maintaining focused attention; our minds wander by design for our own safety. If our minds didn't wander at all, we would miss so many things that happen during the day that present us with problems or even dangers. So, thank your wandering mind if you have never been run over crossing the street!

We *can* improve our mindful attention, however to improve focus, self-knowledge, and well-being. Find some good places to start on the overleaf.

The Beating Breath The Breathing Heart

Inside the right atrium of the heart (the upper right portion) lies an amazing piece of the circulatory puzzle: the sinoatrial node. This node inside the heart acts as a natural pacemaker for heart rate. As we consciously modify the breath with slower, deeper breathing (called diaphragmatic or belly breathing), the sinoatrial node begins to decrease heart rate and activates the parasympathetic nervous system (which relaxes the body).

Due to the stresses of life and the muscular tensions in the shoulders, chest, ribs, and stomach that can result from stress, most of us use shallow chest breathing very often.

Experiment with deep, slow breathing (called diaphragmatic or belly breathing) through the nostrils as you go through your day. If you can, try to set aside 5-10 minutes a day to practice pulling in and pushing out as much air as possible. As you breathe through your nose, focus on the impact that has on your body and stress level. Imagine the breath and heart joining together to slow rate of the beating heart.

Train the breath Train the body Train the mind

Breath awareness is an important skill in stress reduction. Learning to notice the breath can be done by counting.

Try counting the breath in the following way: Breathe in for 1 second; breathe out for 2. Double the time for each successive in- and out-breath until you breathe in for 6 and out for 12 seconds. Then go back down the way you came (5 in, 10 out; 4 in, 8 out; etc.) until you are back at 1 second in and 2 seconds out.

When you finish, allow your breath to move on naturally without your controlling it. As you breathe naturally, repeat to yourself, "I am totally calm and relaxed". Notice any sensations throughout the body. How do you feel? Do you notice a difference from before the exercise? If you were feeling stress before you started, how did the exercise impact that stress.

Try doing a few cycles of this exercise 3 times a day for a week in a quiet and private place. Make sure you use comfortable and healthy posture or even lay down on the floor. Notice how changing the breath might influence the body and mind.

When you sit, just sit When you breathe, just breathe

If you tried the first two exercises given here, you have already practiced mindfulness. Mindful breathing (or breathing skillfully) can be practiced in many different ways. One of the simplest ways to practice skillful breathing is simply to observe the breath occur in its natural rhythm. The beauty is in its simplicity (two steps: breath and notice); but its simplicity is also its challenge. As we discovered on the front of this page, simply noticing the breath is not always easy.

Posture is important. Play with some ways to sit while you observe the breath. Try to keep the back erect and the blood flow unrestricted. Once you find a comfortable posture, don't analyze it anymore. Just sit. When you do this, you can more fully give the attention to breathing.

Try observing the air enter and exit the nostrils. You can imagine your attention on the flow of air is like a hand feeling the current of a gently moving stream. Just sit with the breath. It works all by itself, so you do not need to change it. Try this daily for 5-15 minutes.

Wandering Mind

Fortunately, we do not have to consciously pay attention to everything that happens in our bodies for our bodies to work. Imaging having to control your breathing, heart rate, digestive system, blinking, and maintaining body temperature all while completing all the complex tasks that we face every day! These are automatic. We should be grateful the mind does so many things automatically, however, it should be checked once in a while.

One such automatic process is the wandering mind. Mind wandering is an important part of its function and we need it to notice different aspects of the world, make associations, and remember things. Wandering can also be a nuisance, especially during concentrated tasks. But, just like muscles in the body, the attention can be exercised and strengthened.

In addition to observing the breath (which strengthens attention), you might also try choosing a small object (circular works well) and concentrating solely on that object for 5 minutes. Gaze at it and let everything else fade away. If the eyes strain, close them and visualize the object. Try this daily for improved concentration.

Online Appointment Scheduling! Highest-heights.com

Prefer to call? No problem, dial (864) 345-0193 to reach me 8am-8pm Monday through Saturday.

Schedule an appointment online! Take advantage of having all available appointment times to compare to your personal calendar. No need to call and negotiate an appointment time, just pick which one works for you!

Visit highest-heights.com and click on the "Appointments" tab in the upper right corner of the screen. Click on the blue "Schedule Appointment" option to be redirected to the scheduling page. It's that simple!