Roots to Thrive
Cultivating the Roots of Caregivers

An Evidence-Based Approach to Minimize Stress and Maximize Thriving
Cultivating the Roots of Caregivers: An Evidence-Based Approach to Minimize Stress and Maximize Thriving

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Deep Roots

May you find your balance amid order and chaos;
Enough order to trust in love and enough chaos to find romance within the mystery.

May you accept and embrace the tension of power and powerlessness, independence and intimacy,
contentment and yearning.

May you root deeply in your inner world, enabling all of life to be a meditation,
Buffering you from the swirling outer world;
To this end, may you forge deep roots.
Introduction: Humans First, Caregivers Second

About this Curriculum
The curriculum enclosed in this book represents the culmination of the journey I took to better understand why some caregivers thrive while others struggle to survive each day, even when they are in similar work/life environments. A multi-disciplinary group of caregivers and administrators developed and vetted the curriculum, reflecting the reality that positive change requires a team effort and peer support in the process. We sought to focus in on research-based tools and techniques that promote key resilience factors to buffer caregivers from stress and promote their ability to thrive at work.

A Program of Research. Upon curriculum completion, the work was presented across multiple stakeholder groups, garnering feedback about practical application/implementation pathways. The curriculum enclosed within this book is now intertwined with a program of research that continues to investigate the impacts on caregivers’ sense of coherence, self-compassion, mindfulness development, perception of co-worker relationships, perceived satisfaction with one’s career, and brain changes (EEG measurement).

We recognise that human nature is complex and that weaving concepts such as thriving, stress, trauma, and coping into two primary development and management strategies (sense of coherence and congruence) is lofty and presents a risk of oversimplification; this is not our intent and we hope that readers will explore and expand as they feel led. Our intent is to provide enough theoretical/cognitive groundwork to provide a scientific foundation, but not so much that it distracts from the heart-centered nature of the work.

“As you live deeper in the heart, the mirror gets cleaner and cleaner” (Rumi).

Who is this curriculum for? The curriculum is written for caregivers, caregivers in training, and leaders and educators within caregiving workplaces. While that seems a lofty spread, it aims at the ‘I’ beneath our professional roles and it is from this ‘I’ that we can all find common ground. Thriving happens when healthcare providers use their developmental assets (that is, congruence and sense of coherence) to buffer them against external stressors, lowering their risk of mental and physical distress, improving co-worker relationships, improving job satisfaction, and reducing tendencies to rely on substances to cope with stress.

Who are caregivers? For this work, caregivers are those charged with looking after others. The research within this book focusses on professional caregiving (nurses, physicians, social workers, care aids, etc.), but the curriculum principles also apply to those who provide care for dependants.

Although this curriculum focuses on the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of individual caregivers, change for the better also requires attention to the broader system. We cannot expect people to bloom if the soil in which they are planted fails to provide essential nutrients and if the weather conditions constantly threaten their wellbeing. Any lasting change requires supportive organizational structures that strive to minimize workplace stress and prioritize the cultivation of developmental assets (congruence and sense of coherence) to mitigate the impact of workplace stress (Ruotsalainen Verbeek, Mariné, & Serra, 2016).

How can you use this curriculum? There is a variety of ways to engage in this curriculum including as a course for credit in post-secondary settings, as a workshop for professionals, as a book club or other small group format, or for individuals who would rather work independently or in pairs. Based on personality and opportunity, anyone in any setting can use this curriculum as a framework to begin the
work of digging deeper roots. Through the sections of the introduction that follow, I describe the roots of this curriculum as well as its central metaphor, core concepts, and applications.

**The Roots of The Curriculum**

**Human First.** I come to this work wearing several hats and, as tempting as those hats are to hide under, the ‘I’ beneath them is the real impetus for this work. Like many, my story is full of hopes and heartaches. I left home at 15, entering nursing at 18 dragging a good deal of baggage behind me. I spent many years wearing all the right hats and acquiring all the right awards, degrees, and promotions. As I’ve journeyed through my healthcare career, I learned about both thriving and surviving through trial and error, touching a range of roles including frontline, management, teaching and research. I’ve come to understand that accomplishments and titles have never and will never bring me lasting satisfaction, that blooming where I am planted is more about the journey than the destination, and that along the way I need a community of people that remember who I am when I forget (Demers, 2019). The ‘I’ is more important than the hats we wear and the shoes we fill. My greatest hope is that we as caregivers, humans who give care, come to realize that we too are worthy of care.

I am with you on this journey. We travel together. As caregivers, we wear a common hat, but more importantly, we share our humanity. It is courage, faith, and possibility that propel us forward despite our fears, and it is self-compassion that reminds us to be gentle in the process. Understanding that there is messiness within the journey enables us to focus on progress rather than perfection. To change what we can and accept what we cannot. I promise you, the journey is worth the hardships you may find along the way. Beyond the storms, there are rainbows, reminding us of the beauty within the chaos. At the end of each rainbow is a gift, waiting to be opened, inviting you to step closer to your highest, most authentic self.

*Let us not let our roles hide our humanity.*

**Caregivers Second.** While the research in this book centers on the profession of nursing, I use the term caregivers to refer to physicians, nurses, care aids, and a variety of other disciplines that frequent care settings. One thing that many occupations of caregivers have in common is stress. Workplace stress is a major issue among caregivers, with alarming consequences for caregivers’ physical and mental health (Leiter, Price, & Spence Laschinger, 2010). Many caregivers experience severe levels of emotional exhaustion from job conflicts and stress (Laschinger, Borgogni, Consiglio, & Read, 2015; McKenna, Smith, Poole, & Coverdale, 2003; Parker, Giles, Lantry, & McMillan, 2014). In 2017, the Canadian Medical Association’s National Physician Health Survey found that 49% of residents and 33% of physicians screened positive for depression, and 38% of residents and 29% of physicians for burnout (Simon & McFadden, 2017). In 2015 the Manitoba Nurses Union launched a formal strategy to address the 64% of caregiver suffering from emotional exhaustion and the 52% suffering from critical incident stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (Manitoba Nurses Union, 2015).

*Burnout is comprised of three components: (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization (detachment from the ‘real’ self), (3) diminished sense of accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).*

When our basic human needs go unmet, we experience chronic stress (emerging as anxiety and/or depression) until they are satisfied. As caregivers, we don’t get to thrive while under the cloud of chronic stress that hovers over us when basic human needs go unsatisfied. If unchecked, chronic stress leads to moral injury, emotional exhaustion, and eventual burnout. According to the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH, 2017), moral injury occurs when people or events transgress our moral values and
beliefs. The moral and ethical dissonance that emerges from this form of injury causes a disruption in our ability to trust ourselves and/or others. Examples that can lead to moral injury include mistakes that cause harm, feeling unable to prevent harm, and feeling morally/ethically betrayed by peers and organizational leaders (CAMH, 2017).

Over twenty years of practice, I’ve hovered on the brink of burnout and according to the research I’m not alone. Prolonged levels of stress, fueled by feelings of insecurity, is a normal part of the work for many caregivers. Burnout affects every care provider, if not directly, then indirectly as they feel the ripple effects from struggling co-workers. Work environments that fail to meet basic human requirements drive the ubiquity and severity of this caregiver stress. In turn, caregiver stress is fuels addiction, anxiety, depression, suicide, and attrition rates among caregivers.

The Fallout of Burnout
In Canada 500,000, representing 3% of working Canadians, miss work each day due to mental health related illness (Center for Addiction and Mental Health, 2019). Healthcare workers are 1.5 times more likely to grapple with mental health illness including burnout (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2018). Additionally, one in two Canadians have or have had a mental illness by the time they are 40 (Center for Addiction and Mental Health, 2019) and healthcare providers are at an even higher risk.

Several researchers have investigated attrition rates among caregivers in Canada, finding that nearly 20% are leaving each year in Canada and the United States (NSI, 2018; O’Brien-Pallas, Tomblin Murphy & Shamian, 2008). The attrition rates of novice caregivers are nearly double the rate of experienced nurses, with over half of them leaving because of hostility from co-workers and long periods where they do not feel a sense of belonging (Mckenna et al., 2003; McKenna & Newton, 2007; Thomas & Burk, 2009; Winter-Collins & McDaniel, 2000; Zarshenas, Sharif, Molazem, Khayyer, Zare, & Ebadi, 2014).

As a result of chronic stress, some caregivers will change work settings, some leave the profession altogether, and many remain working despite their burned-out condition, impacting team morale and patient care (Boamah & Laschinger, 2016; Currie & Carr Hill, 2012; Rush, Adamack, & Gordon, 2013). The staff who takes on the extra workload from unfilled vacancies or sick calls related to emotional exhaustion, experience additional pressure to continue providing high quality care with less time to do so. As a result, patients also suffer when staff works short, receiving more rushed and a lesser quality of care (Clark, Leddy, Drain, & Kaldenberg, 2007). Adding to morale and quality care issues, the financial burden on the system is steep. When a caregiver resigns, a recruitment must occur, followed by hiring and training new caregivers to fill the vacancy. In Canada, ten years ago, the average cost to replace a nurse was $25,000 and up to $64,000 to replace specialized nurses (O’Brien-Pallas, Murphy, Shamian, Li, & Hayes, 2010; O’Brien-Pallas et al., 2008). In the United States, turnover costs are similar, ranging from $10,098 to $88,000 per nurse (Li & Jones, 2012). With inflation, these costs are higher now and continue to climb each year. Compounding high attrition costs, in 2014 the supply of registered nurses saw its first decline in the number of Canadian registered nurses in two decades (CIHI, 2015). The Canadian Nurses Association estimated a nursing shortage in Canada would reach a deficit of 60,000 registered nurses by 2022 (Chachula et al., 2015).

Healthcare System Impacts
Statistics range in the research of caregivers leaving their place employment or exiting the profession altogether with nursing attrition rates at nearly 20% each year in Canada and the United States (NSI, 2018; O’Brien-Pallas, Tomblin Murphy & Shamian, 2008). The attrition rates of novice caregivers are nearly double the rate of experienced nurses, with over half of them leaving because of co-worker to co-worker violence and the experience of long periods where they do not feel a sense of belonging (Mckenna et al.,
Root Strength: Sense of Coherence and Congruence

“Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes” (Jung).

Throughout the curriculum, I use the metaphor of a tree to describe the relationship between ourselves and the external factors that drive stress and burnout in caregiving work (Figure 1). The roots represent intrinsic inner assets that provide the tree with the strength to survive, and even thrive, amid the elements. The external forces against the tree represent the everyday adversities within caregiving work. These adversities are largely unnecessary and unproductive, and yet exist as stressors in virtually every caregiver’s workplace to some extent. In this curriculum, I focus not on the weather, but on the roots. The organizational storms in the healthcare system are explored elsewhere. Suffice it to say that fixing the system producing the weather is a worthy and essential endeavor. However, the focus here is on developing the caregiver’s calm in the storm – in part knowing that centered and confident caregivers will both demand and facilitate system change. There are two basic concepts I use that underpin that calm, quiet grounded nature and deep stability of strong roots. The two primary concepts are (1) Sense of Coherence and (2) Congruence.

Our sense of coherence, a concept closely related to mindfulness and self-efficacy, shapes how we relate to the outer world. Developing sense of coherence improves our ability to manage internal and external stimuli with confidence, which prevents stimuli from developing into chronic stress. Congruence, including self-compassion, determines how we relate to the inner world. The more congruent we are the more we can express ourselves authentically, process and resolve dissonance as it arises, and align with a calling that extends beyond ourselves.

Congruence and self-compassion are about deepening our roots by improving our orientation to self; sense of coherence centers on our orientation to life. The combination of the two enables us to self-actualize into our best and most authentic self; they equip us to thrive.

Together, congruence and sense of coherence enable us to thrive in high stimulus work environments, yet few training programs articulate their importance and even fewer provide the tools to attain them. This curriculum provides insight, and evidence-based tools that promote congruence and sense of coherence, which are essential to establish deep roots, buffering caregivers from many of the stressors endemic in the workplace. Those that lack congruence and sense of coherence are more apt to spiral into stress states, disabling thriving, and leading to a host of mental and physical health issues. While some have the benefit of garnering these developmental assets in their childhood, with effort, these assets can also be developed in adulthood.
Figure 1. The depth and strength on our roots (developmental assets) determines our perception of the weather (external stimuli); either viewed as a stimulus to navigate or a stressful threat to our basic needs. The ‘weather,’ presenting in a variety of forms, triggers unresolved trauma/stress from the past, contributing to high cortisol levels that can disable thriving; when unmanaged, our ability to objectively manage stressors (sense of coherence) is compromised. When we do not feel we have the necessary assets to meet our basic needs, incongruence (including shame) results.
**Vision for a Deep-Rooted World**

*Cultivate a deep well inside yourself and you will never thirst.*

While this curriculum pulls from research focused on professional caregiving, it also applies to the informal caregiving roles we take on such as parenting children and caring for dependents. In an ideal world, the world we envision for the generations coming behind us, we begin life depending on others for soothing and to have our basic needs met, we then mature into independent self-soothing adults. In this ideal world, as children we would experience a sense of unconditional positive regard, empowering us to express ourselves authentically. As a result, we develop high levels of congruence and self-compassion, enabling us to accept and embrace our popular and not so popular features. We would incubate in an environment that promotes a confidence to step into meaningful caregiving roles, trusting that we have the resources to manage whatever challenges may arise, and that in the end, all things will work out reasonably (sense of coherence). With adequate developmental and material resources (congruence and high sense of coherence), we would soothe ourselves in the face of suffering, knowing our inner world always has just the right medicine in our time of need. We would come to know this inner world as a place of stillness, the eye of the storm when the winds howl around us. These are thriving roots and with intention and alignment, we come to view the world and take action from this empowered way of being. In a deep-rooted world, everyone has the resources they need to cope with the rain, and better yet, to use the rain to spur on our growth and to inspire service for others.

**Spirituality in the Roots**

*“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, rather we are spiritual beings having a human experience”* (Teilhard de Chardin).

There are elements in this curriculum that may be interpreted as spiritual. However, I write this book with no particular religion or religious lens in mind. Rather, readers should feel able to relate to the material regardless of their religion or lack thereof. If you are finding a section overly spiritual for your liking, use a term that better suits your beliefs or to skip the section altogether. Neuman (1995) and Watson (1988), both seminal theorists in nursing, incorporate spirituality as a core element of whole person caregiving. Over a decade of research links spirituality to health outcomes as evidenced in Loeb, Penrod, Falkenstern, Gueldner and Poon’s (2003) study, showing that a spiritual focus promotes a greater ability for older adults to manage multiple co-morbidities. Similarly, Brady et al.’s (1999) study reported that a spiritual focus positively correlated with a higher quality of life. Despite a substantial amount of evidence of the positive effects of spirituality, we as caregivers often broach the topic with a great deal of trepidation.

Spirituality is woven into this curriculum using terms such as essence, higher power, higher self, or Spirit. If any of these terms is a stumbling block for you, explores others that you are comfortable with. While religious variations can divide us, I believe that we can find common ground in the idea that we are all tethered to an essence that transcends the limits of our humanity. The development of our roots requires a tethering to this essence, accessed and strengthened by dropping into the inner world. In this way, I discuss spirituality as doorway to connect to essence, which can provide a felt sense of unconditional positive regard, cultivating loving-kingness, objectivity, meaning, and guidance amongst a sea of passing feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Incorporating spirituality, or the ability to re-orient our perspective to consider a spiritual force, enhances the mental and physical health benefits of meditation practice (Wachholtz, Malone, & Pargament, 2017). To develop the key requirements of thriving, this curriculum will take you beyond cognitive knowing (the figuring it out mind), letting it fall into the background of a
much larger and spiritually inclusive reality. This common spiritual thread holds each component of the curriculum together.

In the moments when we have the strength to choose love over fear, we are rewarded not only with the knowledge and confidence that we have done something incredibly challenging and beautiful, but also, with the gift of experiencing ourselves as love, and something infinitely more than just the small, fragile ego we thought we were and so desperately needed to protect. We are rewarded with a freedom that surpasses all other freedoms. Ultimately, it is through our willingness to stop defending our idea of ourselves that we discover our true and indestructible self. (Colier, 2018)

The Journey Ahead
The curriculum is divided into ten sections, which start with individuating the ‘real’ self and, through exploration of stressors and resiliency practices, to the expression of a thriving life. Through studying this book and engaging with the exercises, you will try a variety of tools, noticing what resonates and setting aside what does not. You will come to know your inner world in a new way, finding a newfound strength in your inner resources. The first parts of the curriculum are focussed on coming to know, explaining why such a curriculum is needed, exploring the components of healthcare culture that are, ironically, unsupportive of health and wellbeing. Part III through Part X then focus on developing congruence and sense of coherence through a variety of attuning, strengthening, clearing, and aligning practices. As a general overview:

- Part I describes the ‘real’ self, which I discuss throughout the curriculum; it requires us to recognize that we are spiritual beings having a human experience. The ‘real’ self is the spiritual essence of who we are, separate from the social conditioning of this human experience.
- Part II describes the sources and impact of high stimulus, and often stressful, work environments. When we cannot change stressors/weather, we must drop into our roots, mitigating external stressors and enabling us to re-engage in thriving.
- Part III focuses on self-compassion and congruence. Retrieving the parts of us that remain in the shadows requires self-compassion and is a requirement of congruence. As congruence develops, we begin to feel whole, connected, and empowered to express ourselves authentically, finding strength and guidance from a newfound relationship with our inner world.
- Part IV provides insight into managing external stressors, all of which draw upon tools that engage our inner resources to digest and release unresolved emotions/trauma from the past.
- Part V focuses on mindfulness. Staying connected to the inner self, building mindful habits, and letting go of our tendencies to ruminate on thoughts of the past and the future. Sense of coherence develops as we recognize and trust our inner resources, cultivating a greater ability to see the world from a spiritual lens.
- Parts VI and VII describe the factors that promote and detract from our ability to self-soothe, which relates to our degree of connection to the inner world. We explore the tools and techniques that promote the ability to self-soothe as opposed to using external substances and activities to soothe when an external stimulus feels stressful. Self-soothing is a natural result of coming to know, to trust, and to take comfort in the inner world; this is where we connect to our spiritual self.
- Part VIII delves deeper into resolving trauma, using mindfulness to re-orient ourselves in the face of difficult experiences, and connecting, strengthening, and deepening our sense of support and grounding to our spiritual roots.
- Part IX describes how ‘living our calling’ is the doorway to thriving. To live our calling, we align our choices with our essence (values and desires) and the unique life purpose that flows from that
essence. Trusting in these inner resources improves our self-efficacy. Trusting in a higher power promotes thriving and depth during times of suffering and ambiguity.

- Part X turns outward to focus on service and leadership. To sustain any meaningful changes in healthcare culture, priorities and decision-making are rooted in the understanding that lasting change requires a spiritual transformation at every organizational level.

Making the Most of The Curriculum: The Five Transformative Practices

The learning methods (Figure 2) used in the curriculum follow principles of adult learning and metacognitive skill development (Stolovitch & Keeps, 2011). As you immerse in the tools and techniques of this curriculum, you will engage in five transformative practices. In this section, I outline the main components of each practice, so that you can make the most of the curriculum:

**Coming to Know**
- Empowered Learning: Catering to your learning style.
- The core requirements of stress mitigation and thriving.

**Attuning**
- Connecting new learning with experiences and context.
- Practice a variety of exercises to integrate learning.
- Noticing what you notice: Distinguishing signal from noise.
- Tuning by bringing new learning into focus: Pruning the knowledge tree.

**Strengthening**
- Developing sense of coherence through activities that promote:
  - Meaning making
  - Self-efficacy
  - Mindfulness
- Developing congruence through activities that promote:
  - Authentic expression
  - Self-compassion

**Clearing**
- Identifying and old belief systems: pivoting via re-orientation
- Identifying and digesting areas of incongruence and trauma

**Aligning**
- Leaning into your ‘real’ self: connecting to authentic values and desires
- Embracing connectivity beyond your container
- Living your calling
- Goal-setting that aligns with your calling, propelling you toward your vision
- Setting out on a new trajectory via new habits/ways of being
- Stepping into compassionate leadership

Activities and practices enable shifts in our way of being, challenging old beliefs with evidence-based tools and techniques, and offering new perspectives to re-orient ourselves. As illustrated in figure 2, we come to know about our biology, psychology, and human tendencies by building awareness and understanding the research. We apply the research to our experiences and unique contexts. Via practice and habit formation, we come to be more whole as we transform superficial knowledge into a deep integrated knowing. Finally, by making small changes we set out on a new trajectory. Like an airplane adjusts its orientation by one degree, it is barely perceivable in the beginning, but over the course of the flight it changes its final destination. New trajectories are about making small, intentional adjustments to our orientation to the world and our orientation to self, which overtime will alter the course of our lives.
Because we are all different, some exercises will resonate, others will not. Keep what you like and let go of the rest, trusting that the tool you need will come to you when you need it. Additionally, if we interpret tools as magic bullets, coming from a ‘fix me’ mentality, we promote further incongruence. However, if we approach the work with curiosity and self-compassion, we strengthen self-trust, self-integrity, and improve our sense of coherence and congruence in the process.

Knowledge is not what you can remember, but what you cannot forget

As demonstrated in Figure 2 and Appendix A, this curriculum follows a framework where participants come to know the heart of their identity by:

- dropping into their inner world and attuning to their values, authenticity and intuition, developing their ability to distinguish the imprints of social conditioning and survival/stress behaviours;
- strengthening their true identity and inner/outer congruence through mindfulness, understanding the process of trauma recovery and stress mitigation, and practicing integrity in relationships;
- clearing their inner world through self compassion, unconditional positive regard, insight, and releasing shame;
- developing their sense of “calling” and coherence by aligning true identity with professional identity.

Practices are not Prescriptions
There are many suggestions and exercises included in this curriculum; these are not intended as magic bullets, but to enhance self-awareness through exploration, experimentation, and critical reflection on how each practice may or may not resonate with our unique needs and desires. Assuming that the practices will suit everyone only breeds homogenization. Our brain chemistries, our past experiences, our projections, and vulnerabilities are all different. With our unique needs and desires in mind, there are no general prescriptions that will work for all. Rather, the exercises are tools to try and for you to decide if they heartfully resonate, and whether they are helpful on your journey toward a greater sense of coherence and congruence.
“Respond to every call that excites your spirit” (Rumi, Jalâl & Barks, 1997).

Attuning is a reflection practice, where we filter events, opinions, and practices through the lens of our heart. This form of reflection (taking notice of what resonates) as you work through the concepts and after each practice is the most important part. Through reflection we come to know ourselves, what engages our hearts and minds, including our desires or lack of desire to continue with certain practices. Be mindful of what comes up for you with each practice, let go of what isn’t resonating and hold on to what is. When you find you are ‘attaching’ to a practice or tool, remember that they are guideposts on this journey of self-discovery and self-healing. Notice which ones seem to illuminate undigested dissonance from the past that are perhaps ready to heal; notice how they stir your emotions and desires.

To prompt practice/exercise opportunities, I use a weight lifting icon

To prompt attuning/reflecting opportunities, I use a pen icon
PART I: What Does it Mean to Thrive?

We all encounter numerous forks in the road every day. The path we take, impacted by a variety of factors, determines our ability to thrive. The forks in the road represent our everyday clinical moments, when we as caregivers give and receive, fill and receive filling. Taking the thriving path describes those moments when we express ourselves authentically; when we immerse in meaningful conversation; when we get so lost in the fun of completing our tasks that our workday flies by. As we develop a habit of taking the path of thriving, the experiences of ease, fluidity, and flow compound. As a result, we look forward to going to our place or work, driven by a sense of meaning, excited by the mysteries that will unfold, and stimulated by challenges we feel empowered to navigate.

Conversely, if we encounter the fork in the road and we take the other path, the one prescribed to us, but that does not align with our ‘real’ values and desires, we find that the efforts outweigh the rewards. We start to wear, feeling a lack of energy that makes our tasks feel obligation and onerous. The time seems to creep by as we wait for the end of our shift. The mysteries of the day feel threatening, unsure of what will come and if we have the resources to manage it. Challenges that arise threaten our last drops of energy and as a result, we feel tired, emotionally exhausted, irritated by those things and people that require our attention. We fear we are becoming ‘that caregiver’, that caregiver we always swore we would never be, and so, to prevent such an atrocity, we put on a smiling face and we push down the negative emotions that burn within us. How did we get here?

Thriving, as I see it, is living a self-actualized professional and personal life. Thriving is living life to the fullest, being authentic and present in every moment, feeling contentment through life’s inevitable twists and turns. When there is suffering or sadness, it is for good and not for self or other-destructive purposes.

A characteristic of self-actualization is the subconscious need to achieve, "to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism” (Rogers, 1951, p. 487). A self-actualized person is one in whose: contact with reality is simply more direct. And along with this unfiltered, unmediated directness of their contact with reality comes also a vastly heightened ability to appreciate, again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy, however stale those experiences may have become for others. ...For such people, even the casual workaday, moment-to-moment business of living can be thrilling, exciting, and ecstatic. (Maslow, 1968, p. 214-215)

Self-actualized people accept their fallible human nature and are more tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity in the workplace. These caregivers will have significant interpersonal work relationships and freely accept their colleague’s spontaneous thoughts and behaviors. They have a clear sense of reality and an objective tolerance for the incongruent nature of professional ideals. They take on unpredictable events with creativity and a sense of humor. Finally, they continue to feel an appreciation for life, despite its unpredictable nature, and look forward with optimism to the limitless opportunities on the horizon (Maslow, 1954).

The self-actualizing process centers on the ability to engage with life from a congruent place. Congruence describes the alignment of our ‘real’ self (who we actually are) and our ‘ideal’ self (who we think we should be); it is a requirement of thriving (Rogers, 1959). The ability to be authentic is an honoring of the intertwining connection of our mind, body, and spirit. Authenticity involves taking ownership of our life and fully taking part in it. Our internal compass guides us, enabling us to see the world and actions in the world through our eyes, rather than the eyes of others (Rowen, 2015). In addition to promoting self-actualization/thriving, the ability to authentically express our self (congruence) enables us
to reach a level of fulfillment that transitions us from looking solely at our needs to the needs of others (Starcher, 2006). Conversely, when motivated by a role ascribed to us by others, we act from an obligation to gain approval, consumed with meeting our felt need to be loved and accepted by others.

Based on the interweaving of terms in the literature, **self-actualization and thriving are interchangeable terms.** Both share definitions using similar descriptors. For example, those who are thriving feel alive, full of energy, and optimistic about their progress and learning (Mortier, Vlerick, & Clays, 2016; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012).

**Engaging in Thriving**
Why do some people thrive while others struggle to survive each day, even though they are in similar work/life environments? There are key developmental factors that determine if people can express themselves authentically and whether or not they feel threatened by external stimuli; these factors determine our ability to thrive.

*The word stimuli describes the events, interactions that move and change around us and the resulting thoughts and feelings about the events that then arise within us. Stimuli in themselves don’t cause stress, it is the interpretation of the stimuli, the related thoughts and feelings, that provoke the stress response.*

While some have the benefit of garnering developmental assets in childhood with effort, they can also be developed in adulthood. External factors can be helpful or harmful to our ability to thrive, represented by the weather in figure 1 (Introduction), but internal factors play just as great, if not a larger role, in thriving. Both roots and weather are important. However, when we thrive, we are less likely to experience the weather as a threat. For instance, with deep roots we are less vulnerable to role ambiguity (unclear expectations and unpredictable work environments), interpersonal tensions, and the unpredictable nature of our personal and work environments. When work environments have less extreme weather conditions, such as less co-worker hostility, manageable workloads, less ambiguity, more order, and better predictability, they promote thriving. As illustrated, the two are interdependent. While having strong roots buffers us from stressors, they are both impactful and intertwining parts of the equation.

In this Part I, we’ll cover three core intrinsic factors that we all encounter: (1) *The basic human requirements to thrive,* (2) *congruence* (orientation to self) enables us to reconcile our ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ world, and (3) *sense of coherence* (orientation to the external world) determines our ability to understand and confidently manage external stimuli, and finally, how the three concepts compound and interweave. Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between our basic needs, congruence, and sense of coherence. Assuming that we all have common requirements and that humans and subsequently caregivers are ultimately motivated to thrive/self-actualize, we can then also assume that if a primary need goes unmet, we will experience stress, distracting and often disabling us from thriving, until it is satisfied. Congruence and sense of coherence determine whether we interpret internal (emotions) and external (thoughts and unexpected events) stimuli as an obstacle to navigate or as a threatening stressor.
The Meeting of Human Needs as a Precursor to Thriving

*When unable to transcend towards self-actualization due to an unmet need, one will experience stress until the unmet need is satisfied (Maslow, 1943).*

Recognizing that thriving is a complex topic, impacted by a variety of cultural factors, most of us can agree that there are certain human requirements necessary to engage in self-actualization/thriving. When we cannot get these basic needs met, the stressor (threatening stimuli) will distract us, if not completely derail us from thriving (Maslow, 1943). While Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) garners plenty of criticism for its linear nature and shortcomings related to spirituality and cultural variations, most of us can agree that we have basic human needs and that these needs must be met. If not met, we will at least be distracted and potentially, completely disabled from thriving. Despite the theory’s shortcomings, for the purpose of describing the impetus for stress, Maslow’s hierarchy is fitting. The core human needs are described in five categories arranged in order of priority. These needs, in order, are physiological survival, security, belonging, esteem, and finally, thriving. For this curriculum, I do not focus on the hierarchical nature of the pyramid, as it is empirically supported, nor helpful to understand the nature of stress. Furthermore, in later years, he added transcendence as an additional level, recognizing spirituality as an impactful factor and also demonstrating that as we self-actualize, we naturally transcend to be more outwardly focused (Maslow, 1968). The theory of unmet needs is an adequate framework to understand that a person is motivated to satisfy basic needs, and those that are more primal survival needs such as hunger, thirst, warmth, and sleep are highly distracting/disabling if not addressed. For caregivers, these needs include adequate work breaks to hydrate, eat, and rest (away from the stimuli). They also require adequate food, sleep, and shelter outside
of work. If these needs are threatened by workplace stimuli (i.e., stormy weather in Figure 1) and remain unsatisfied, caregivers will struggle to thrive, distracted by the primal need to fulfill their unmet needs.

Once one set of basic needs are met, such as physiological needs (no physical threats to our survival are present), it becomes easier to turn our focus to our need for emotional safety, security, belonging, and esteem. If we as caregivers cannot attain emotional security, a sense of belonging, and esteem (including confidence to navigate external stimuli) at work, we are unlikely to engage in thriving. Those with shallower roots systems, such as many novice caregivers, commonly report one or more of these unmet needs in the workplace (Rhéaume, Clément, & LeBel, 2011). For example, Janice, a new graduate nurse shared her experience as she entered her professional practice:

“[In the beginning], I was so stressed from work, I would just come home and cry. I would go right to bed...I couldn’t add one more thing [to my life apart from work], even if it may have helped. I was too overwhelmed. I wasn’t taking breaks. It was just too busy. I was so stressed...we were all just drowning. ...You are so overwhelmed by the need to feel like you needed to prove yourself that I ...missed a lot of breaks. There is this feeling that if you are asking for help to much or bringing things up that you will be viewed like, ‘hey, what’s not working here, what’s wrong with you?’” (Dames, 2018)

Based on Maslow’s theory, if these novice caregivers continue to endure threatening weather, missing food and rest breaks (explained in Part II as normal novice inefficiencies), endure hostility from senior members (more on horizontal violence in Part II), and feel too emotionally unsafe to express themselves authentically in their professional role (resulting in moral injury due to incongruence), they will be distracted or even disabled from thriving. As a result, we will continue to see high rates of novice caregiver burnout. Caregivers with deeper roots, established by high levels of congruence and sense of coherence, are equally vulnerable to physiological threats, but they will have a higher stress threshold in the realms of emotional security, belonging, and esteem needs.

**Congruence: Reconciling Our Real Versus Ideal Selves**

“Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks--we will also find our path of authentic service in the world” Palmer (2000).

Thriving requires authenticity (congruence), which is the gatekeeper to fulfillment of desire and higher states of consciousness; this is where transpersonal and spiritual ways of being are accessed. Self-integrity is an inner sense of wholeness, which comes from living authentically. If life experiences and the work environment provides feelings of emotional security and acceptance, enabling caregivers to feel safe to be authentic, then they would more likely to thrive.

Self-integrity, our ability to be authentic and feel whole, is priceless. Doing or saying anything that erodes your sense of self, stripping you of inner peace, is too expensive.

Self-compassion and congruence intertwine. To attain congruence, we must have a high degree of self-compassion, which enables us to act authentically, despite the risk of disapproval from others. When we are congruent, accepting our ‘real’ self, shortcomings and all, we are more likely to practice self-compassion.

Congruence describes our orientation to self, alignment with heart and spirit, resulting in an ability to express ourselves authentically. Most of us can point out some differences between who we are, and who we believe we ought to be. Carl Rogers’ (1959), a seminal psychologist and researcher, developed his
theories on congruence, thriving, and personality concurrently with his endeavors in empirical research. The concept of congruence between the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ provides insights into the basic belonging and esteem needs required to engage in thriving.

When you accept your flaws, you are free of the fear of shame. When you are free of shame, scrutiny from others loses its sting.

Rogers suggested that for a person to achieve congruence, they require an environment that provides them with **unconditional positive regard**. Unconditional positive regard emerges from grace, enabling us to value and accept one another despite our failings. When we believe we are unconditionally and positively regarded, we become willing and able to act authentically without, or despite, a fear of rejection. Within this safe, accepting, and empathic space comes the willingness to be open and to self-disclose.

*Unconditional positive regard facilitates ease and healing in all ways.*

To better understand how we assimilate to view ourselves and other humans in terms of conditions, imagine a baby, it’s very essence. See its innate sense of worth, it’s precious spirit, apart from any conditions. We can easily attach a sense of unconditional positive regard to this child. Now, imagine attaching conditions to this baby innate worth and value. This baby must achieve several goals, maintain a certain body type, attain the right degrees, live in a certain dwelling and drive a certain car to be acceptable and loved. As ludicrous as this may seem to apply conditions of worth to a baby, we lose sight of this sense of inherent worth as we assimilate, and we often expect others to assimilate in the same fashion. These enculturated conditions often shroud our ability to accept their innate essence, apart from societal ideals. When one believes others unconditionally and positively regard them, they can then mirror the same inwardly; this is **self-compassion**. As a buffer against these feelings of threat that emerge when we feel insecure about our basic needs getting met, when we respond with self-compassion, we interrupt the stress response by providing the unconditional positive regard to ourselves that we are longing for from others. As self-compassion meets this need, we are more likely to keep the potential threat in perspective, act to resolve it, and as a result, we prevent declines in our well-being. Within this context, self-compassion intertwines with congruence in its acceptance of the ‘real’ self, despite immersion in a culture that focuses heavily on the ‘ideal’ self. Self-compassion fulfills our self-esteem needs, enabling us to thrive.

Similar to Maslow (1943), Rogers argued that there are contextual requirements needed before persons can develop fully. Rather than illustrating these needs via a hierarchy, he also compared it to a tree that will not flourish without sunlight and water (Rogers, 1959). Flourishing requires nurturing environments that cultivate authenticity, promoting a sense of belonging, where we feel known and accepted. These nurturing spaces result in the ability for us to engage in thriving. This same premise applies to the ability for caregivers to thrive in their role(s).

To further describe congruence, a person’s level of congruence between their ‘real’ self and ‘ideal’ self is a primary indicator of their likelihood to engage in thriving (Rogers, 1986). Professional incongruence (illustrated in Figure 4) is the misalignment of actual experiences compared to the ‘ideal’ picture (Rogers, 1986). For example, if the caregiving ideals we learn in our training cannot be actualized in the field, shame often results. If we cannot resolve this incongruence, we will experience chronic shame, which is often felt as a chronic sense of anxiety or stress in our work role. Our degree of incongruence depends on how far apart the perceived ‘real’ self and the ‘ideal’ self are. These incongruences affect decision-making because we are likely to do things to please others, rather than satisfying our own needs. Those who have a greater discrepancy between the ‘real’ and the ‘ideal’ will be more at risk for
maladjustment, resulting in feelings of shame and dissatisfaction (Rogers, 1959). Furthermore, those with unresolved trauma, and/or resentments towards self/others are likely to feel and act incongruently due to the resulting subconscious projections that spill over onto ourselves and others.

Regarding the workplace context, congruence between the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ self relates to the perceived unconditional positive regard we experienced in childhood, enabling deep roots, which then enable us to express ourselves congruently as adults in the workplace. Additionally, a felt sense of unconditional positive regard from at least one colleague (more in mentorship in Part X) promotes the ability for us to be our authentic self, even when it differs from the status quo. Conversely, when our self-worth and sense of value at work feels conditional, it erodes our self-confidence, our ability to trust our emotions, and our decision-making capacity. The stress that results hampers our ability to thrive. When we work in environments that feel conditional, we are more likely to prioritize the opinions and values of others above our own, leading to further incongruence.

**Figure 4.** Incongruence between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ (Rogers, 1959). This figure illustrates how we feel we should be, which may or may not reflect our reality. The further apart these two circles are, the more shame we will carry for not being who we believe we should be.

**The Dance: Navigating Obstacles to Congruence**

Incongruence between personal values/desires and professional obligations is a barrier to thriving because thriving requires authentic expression. Our ability to make meaning is limited when we act out of obligation, stripped of the passion that emerges from a thriving state of mind. For example, in a Canadian study involving 23 new graduate nurses, the strongest motivators for providers to leave their workplace are a lack of empowerment, demonstrated by an inability to internalize goals, and to exercise professional ideals in the workplace (Rhéaume et al., 2011). Based on Rogers’ (1986) theory, this common scenario reflects incongruence between the learned ‘ideals’ of our profession and the ‘real’ work in the clinical environment. The further apart the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ are, the more incongruence and resulting shame we will feel (Rogers, 1986). Figure 4 illustrates the incongruence between the ideals of the profession and the reality of the work, which hampers our ability to engage in thriving (Rogers, 1986). We all strive to self-actualize, enabling us to help others to do the same. If we become blocked from transcending in this way, we will feel stress. Stress motivates us to make a change, doing whatever we can to remove the block. If
the stressors (our basic needs are chronically threatened) are unchangeable, there are two potential scenarios: we will look for another work role or environment that will enable us to thrive; or, because there are many situations that make leaving a well-paying job infeasible, we will bide our time, and often succumb to frequent moments of emotional exhaustion and hostility. Most of us who have been in the field long enough can relate to both scenarios.

Role Transitions. Another core aspect of thriving is the intertwining of our personal and professional journey, requiring multiple role transitions. It’s difficult to balance our energy as we take off one hat and put on another. For those of us who have or had small children, you may be familiar with the guilt you feel when you get home and too exhausted to engage with your children. Or for those who are more introverted, it can be a challenge to maintain friendships outside of high stimulus work environments when being at home alone is what you need to recharge outside of work.

Taylor and Dell’Oro (2006) liken the balance of roles as a dance, learning new and varying rhythms as we take off one hat and put on another. This curriculum focuses on developing the core assets required to find our rhythm by engaging in thriving while navigating personal and workplace stimuli/stressors. Having and displaying integrity is more a matter of being able to move in ways that are consistent with the originating and developing themes of our lives. Teachers, guides, and practice make us better dancers because they help us listen more carefully and follow the music we hear more confidently. We learn which movements fit the rhythms and which do not. There is rarely just one way to enact an excellent dance to fit a particular melody— and sometimes, when we have learned to hear the music more clearly, to understand it more deeply, we find that we have to change our steps. (p. 95)

On a similar note, Desmond (2012) explained this artful process as a living intelligence that is “open, attentive, mindful, and attuned to the occasion in all its elusiveness and subtlety” (p. 192). He described the experience as one that contributes to the situation and receives fulfillment in the same moment.

Thriving requires a constant balance of filling and being filled, implying a certain degree of flexibility and a sense of security within caregiving work cultures. Flourishing cultures produce a graceful environment for caregivers to find their footing within a rapidly changing work environment. There is room to learn from mistakes and opportunities to adjust our steps to attune to our unique rhythm.

A Hidden Curriculum that Promotes Incongruence. Another element of congruence relates to the ability of caregivers to be authentic in the workplace. O’Callaghan (2013) described a hidden curriculum in medical cultures, where cognitive expression is praised and emotional expression is largely suppressed, fueling incongruence in caregiving cultures. This hidden curriculum is rampant in post-secondary settings, which then informs professional habits, co-worker relationships, and patient care. The implicit message delivered in this hidden curriculum is that our ‘real’/emotional self is not welcome in the practice setting, which is instilled by shame and intimidation, and ultimately results in incongruent practitioners. When students incubate in an environment of intimidation and shame in their training, they enter the workforce with well engrained habits, pushing their ‘real’ selves into the shadows and perpetuating the same expectations onto their colleagues, mentees, and patients (O’Callaghan, 2013). Conversely, role-modeling emotional congruence promotes reciprocal behaviors, which encourages authentic displays of emotion and perpetuates nurturing and respectful behaviors to co-workers and patients. The element of being ‘real’ occurs via transparency, undergirded by compassion and reliability (Rogers, 1968; Venise et al., 2015). These same implicitly learned behaviors promote congruent workplaces and identify formation.

The socialization and imbedding of professional ‘ideals’ begins in the post-secondary setting (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010). Our degree of congruence between our ‘real’ self (roots) and professional ‘ideals’ depends on the alignment between our personal and professional values. When we do not feel emotionally safe to express our ‘real’ selves, we often act in ways that result in further
incongruence. This incongruence, where we are less connected to our roots, further creates a constant state of ambiguity (threatening weather) with who we really are, which produces high emotional labor.

Arlie Hochschild, a sociologist and feminist thought leader, coined the term emotional labor, describing it as the practice of emoting states of being incongruent with our genuine feelings (Hochschild, 2012).

In the workplace, our degree of incongruence between our ‘real’ emotions and the ‘ideal’ we are expected to display, correlates with the rate in which we burn our emotional energy. Those who tend toward incongruent displays, triggering moral injury, are more prone to emotional exhaustion and burnout. This understanding centers on the ability or inability for us to be authentic, which is a primary characteristic of thriving (Maslow, 1987). I elaborate on emotional labor in Part II.

Not Knowing Our self. When the practice of being who we should be rather than whom we are becomes a well-established way of life we can no longer rely on emotions to accurately guide us with any accuracy. Our genuine values and feelings about events and other people become muddled to the point where they become generally inaccessible. “They have learned how to con themselves, and no longer know who they really are” (Bergquist, 1993, pp. 73). Based on Rogers’ (1959) work, feeling ambiguous about our self, how we feel, and the values that drive us prevents the ability to resolve emotional dissonance. This ambiguousness, resulting in incongruence, is echoed in these novice caregiver statements (Dames, 2018):

“Whatever happened was my fault in some way.” (Mary)
“I don’t like to confront tension, I guess I’m worried for being called out for being wrong or bad or whatever.” (Rhonda)
“If something goes wrong in the room…I automatically think it is my fault somehow… I was terrified of not being what others expected of me, or even what I expected of me… terrified of failing. It felt like it would destroy me.” (Tabitha)

Conversely, in workplaces that promote and celebrate diverse ways of being, thinking, and doing, it is likely that providers will exercise their personality traits and personal values in their professional role. This curriculum focuses on improving congruence through the development of authentic expression, self-compassion, and forgiveness practices. To promote congruent decision-making, you will work to align your goals, actions, and life roles with your values and desires.

**Digging Deeper into Sense of Coherence and Thriving**

While we can’t always change what we are doing, we can change how we do it; our life orientation determines whether a stimulus becomes a stressor.

Adding to congruence, our orientation to self, sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979) describes the cognitive components of thriving, which impacts our orientation to our thoughts and our external world and the ability to navigate stimuli before they become stressors. When we interpret stimuli as a threat/stressor, we get distracted if not completely disabled from thriving. Aaron Antonovsky developed sense of coherence (SOC) over 40 years ago while working with Holocaust survivors. He aimed to understand why some people appeared resilient to “dis-ease” when faced with stressful events, while others were more likely to succumb to illness. His work contrasted the status quo theories held by researchers, where common medical culture perceived stress as negative and a threat to health (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2007).
Conversely, Antonovsky viewed stress as a natural part of life. As such, while congruence reflects our orientation to self (our ability to authentically express ourselves), sense of coherence reflects our orientation to the external world. Aaron Antonovsky’s (1979) sense of coherence is predictive for our ability to engage in thriving, reflected in the correlations with health outcomes and whether or not stimuli is interpreted as stressful. It is widely accepted as a significant and reliable across cultures (Eriksson & Lindström, 2005). Sense of coherence is a descriptor of orientation to life and a predictive tool for health outcomes. It describes the confidence to manage life’s stressors and feelings of **optimism** that events will work out reasonably well (Antonovsky, 1979). Sense of coherence includes three components:

- Comprehensibility
- Manageability, and
- Meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987).

First, **comprehensibility** describes the extent to which we can make logical sense of the events taking place in our life and if these events feel consistent and structured. Second, **manageability** is determined by the confidence we have in our ability to cope with stimuli, which may or may not be stressful. Third, **meaningfulness** describes sense making and gratitude, which makes difficult events feel worthy of their commitment.

Antonovsky (1987) found that individuals differed in their Sense of coherence and that these differences have immediate and long-term effects on our mental/physical health. Those with high sense of coherence scores are less likely to view stimuli as a stressor. The stressor is seen as comprehensible and solvable, resulting in feelings of being grounded and in control (Pallant & Lae, 2002). When a stimulus produces stress, they are more likely to choose coping mechanisms that promote health and deal with tensions (Antonovsky, 1979).

In a study of 51 fourth year nursing students in Western Canada, those with lower sense of coherence scores were less satisfied with nursing as a career choice and were more likely to use substances to cope (Dames & Javorski, 2018). On a similar note, the impact of sense of coherence is evident in many studies, showing that low sense of coherence scores are predicative of higher levels of stress from workplace stimuli (Eriksson & Lindström, 2006; Erim, Tagay, Beckmann, Bein, Cicinnati, Beckebaum, Senf, & Schlaak, 2010; Nahlen & Sabooonchi, 2009; Streb, Haller, & Michael, 2014) and are more likely to engage in substance use to cope (Larm, Åslund, Starrin, & Nilsson, 2016: Dames & Javorski, 2018). Conversely, those who have higher sense of coherence scores are more likely to engage in thriving, make healthier coping choices, a tendency to exercise more, choose healthier foods, have stronger feelings of optimism, resilience, hardiness, control, and live with an overall higher quality of life (Andersen & Berg, 2001; Bergh, Baigi, Fridlund, & Marklund, 2006; Eriksson & Lindström, 2007; Hassmén, Koivula, & Uutela, 2000; Myrin & Lagerstrom, 2006; Wijk & Waters, 2008).

Based on a 21-year longitudinal study of 1,265 children in New Zealand, other qualities that trended with the higher sense of coherence scores were a positive temperament, higher intellectual skills, and a positive view of the self (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003). In a recent qualitative study (Dames, 2018), participants who had a high degree of confidence (a component of sense of coherence) and who could easily find meaning (also a component of sense of coherence) from other life roles they felt buffered from some of the ambiguity they felt as a novice caregiver. For example, Tabitha’s confidence in another life role had a positive impact on her work role:

*Because I’m so new, I don’t know everything and have questions all the time, it easy to wonder if you will ever get it, but then you have to remind yourself that outside of nursing I know that I am really good at this and this, and in terms of my identity I am first and foremost a mother and an [athlete]. It feels okay to feel crappy at work when I know that I’m really awesome over here!* (Dames, 2018)
Antonovsky (1979) described how developmental and material assets promote flourishing, which is similar to Maslow’s (1971) requirements of thriving. The more assets we have, the higher our sense of coherence and the better our ability to engage in thriving. For example, these assets include self-esteem and social supports outside of work, which impact our ability to tolerate and manage socially unsupportive work environments. These assets can also be material assets such as our financial picture, empowering us to leave a work environment that is causing us chronic stress. Our ability to attain developmental, social, and material assets positively correlates with our level of sense of coherence, which promotes an ability to manage stimuli before they feel stressful. Therefore, we as caregivers can bolster our ability to manage stress and to thrive by developing these resources.

Finally, sense of coherence intertwines with self-efficacy and mindfulness development. Self-efficacy describes our level of confidence and motivation to manage life events (passing weather). Mindfulness is defined in depth in Part V, but as an overview, it enables us to investigate passing thoughts and emotions from a place of non-attachment, preventing them from feeling threatening. Mindfulness is a core component of sense of coherence, enabling non-attachment from stimuli to objectively resolve or at the least manage it. If we cannot view them objectively (non-attachment), we are more likely to avoid and resist emotions, disabling our ability to resolve or at least manage them. A high sense of coherence often prevents stimuli from feeling stressful and as a result, it is a protective factor against stressful work environments (Gillespie, Chaboyer, & Wallis, 2007). This curriculum focuses on the development of mindfulness because it is the doorway to re-orientation. How we orient ourselves in the world, determines our ability to engage in thriving. For example, cultivating gratitude and optimism improves sense of coherence, buffering us from stress by improving our ability to creatively manage stimuli before they evolve into stressors.

_Congruence is our anchor to the inner world. Sense of coherence describes our ability to confidently and creatively navigate the external world. Calling enables us to lift our eyes toward a north star, immersing us in our vision, propelling us forward. When we develop these three characteristics of self, we minimize stress and maximize our ability to thrive._

**The Journey Ahead**

Part 1 describes the requirements of thriving, including deep roots and our related orientation to the inner world (congruence) and the outer world (sense of coherence). From these roots, we draw on the resources needed to manage emotions and to navigate external stimuli before they become stressors. Now we move into an exploration stress, what it is, and common triggering factors that emerge in caregiving work environments.
PART II: Stress

Stress constantly derails our ability to thrive. Stress is remarkably common across the population; twenty-three percent of Canadian adults’ report that most of their days are highly stressful (Statistics Canada, 2014). While we often think of stress as a mental construct, when unaddressed it has profound effects on the body. In healthcare settings, stress produces a chronic biological response (O’Malley, Dowd, Brungardt, & Cox, 2015) leading to a host of chronic mental and physical diseases.

Over the course of Part II, we will walk through the common stressors that together, create a perfect storm for caregiver burnout. But take heart, the Parts after this one provides both theory and practice to help you find the eye of that storm.

Where Does Stress Come From? How Does Stress Work?

Rhonda was a research participant who was in her mid-twenties, new to nursing, and struggling to thrive in her novice nurse role. Her account captures the epitome of stress on the job, describing the need to face disturbing events at work without the confidence and/or resources to operate effectively:

'It [safety] feels at risk on pretty much every shift. Last set a patient charged me with a med cart. … The day before that a patient took a sheet and put it over my head. … We had a patient’s family member shoot himself outside the hospital, and the hospital did not do anything, like no debriefing or anything, which made me feel really unsafe and unsupported. Pretty much every shift people are threatening us, saying that they are going to come back with a gun. … I would come off a night and have two days to turn around and go back for a day. I was a wreck. I was so exhausted. By the third night shift, every time I would turn into a crazy nurse by the third night. I was so emotional, I couldn’t function, and I couldn’t sleep. (Participant quote – Rhonda, from Dames, 2018)

Stress can be defined in two ways: as the stressor (external source of “bad weather”), or as the experience of distress. In this curriculum, we distinguish the source of stress from the experience of stress. A combination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors triggers the perception of threat. Extrinsic factors are those events over which we have little control, making up the stormy weather in our tree metaphor. By contrast, intrinsic factors – especially congruence and sense of coherence – are our root systems, buffering against stress and its effects.

Essentially, stress works like this: If we believe a primary need is going unmet or feels threatened, we will experience stress until the unmet need is satisfied or until the stimuli that threatens it dissipates. The experience of stress among caregivers signals an unmet need or a threat to our needs. The persistence of unmet needs undermines our ability to thrive.

Biologically, the stress response works like this: When we feel threatened, our amygdala taps the hypothalamus, which then sends a signal to our nervous system, triggering the release of our stress hormones (epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol). Stress hormones are designed to get our attention in a big way, making sure we resolve the perceived threat. As a result, an automatic biological response ensues, engaging what is called our sympathetic nervous system. We experience an increase in metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, respirations, blood sugar, immune system arousal, and muscle tension. This is called the fight-flight-freeze response and is designed to help us identify and escape from danger. However, as we well know, the fight-flight-freeze response is often triggered at times when we would be better off staying calm and relaxed, for example when speaking in public. The more sensitive we are to stress, the more likely we are to trip our nervous systems when there is no true danger to us.

Research that aims to measure stress often does so by measuring cortisol levels in the body. Often referred to the “stress hormone”, cortisol is produced by the adrenal cortex, in response to physical and
psychological stress. Cortisol impacts numerous metabolic processes and the immune system, both of which are significant contributors to numerous acute chronic diseases. The process begins with threatening thoughts that trigger the sympathetic nervous system to flood the blood stream with cortisol. Researchers use cortisol measurements to quantify one’s experience of acute and chronic stressors. There are many ways to interrupt the triggering of the systemic nervous system and to activate the parasympathetic system, which enables the body to relax. In this curriculum, we refer to cortisol as the single best biological indicator of the experience of stress, and we highlight practices that activate the parasympathetic nervous system to counteract its effects.

Stress is not always negative. The experience of stress can alert us to situations that demand our attention and motivate us to resolve them. However, when the experience of stress endures beyond the threatening event or is excessive, it becomes distress. When distress goes unchecked, it becomes chronic and limits our ability to keep perspective. While some stress can enhance our ability to resolve stressors, distress undermines this ability. Chronic stress, when it becomes distress, leads to numerous negative mental, physical, and spiritual consequences.

Part II provides a review of the literature surrounding the common sources of caregiver stress. Workplace factors that interplay to compound stress include vicarious trauma, unmanaged emotional labour, effort-reward imbalances, workplace hostility, physical violence, and heavy workloads. Finally, our sense of coherence and congruence determine the intensity of the experience of these stressors, the ability to express ourselves authentically at work, the likelihood of using substances to cope, and the ripple effects on the healthcare system (Dames, 2018; Schwabe & Wolf 2013).

**Empathy and Vicarious Trauma: Hurt Too Close to Home**

Empathy describes the ability to put our self in another’s shoes, especially in times of suffering. According to a recent study by Buffone et al. (2017), there are two ways to engage in empathy. You can imagine what the other is feeling (cultivating compassion) or imagine yourself feeling what they are feeling, taking on the feelings as if they are your own. While they seem similar, the long-term impact they can have on us is notably different. The first provides a degree of non-attachment that buffers us from over identifying with the situation and more closely aligns with compassion. Blatchford’s (2019) description of her experience walking alongside a loved one with Parkinsons illustrates empathetic engagement:

...when your heart is being broken open by life, there can be moments when you may feel your breaking merging with the breaking others are experiencing. It’s as when waves, from various directions, created by different disturbances, meet and become one within a river or on the surface of a body of water. One glance at the face of another, or others, and you know what they are feeling. Their feeling washes over and into you, becoming yours, too. (Blatchford, 2019)

Caregivers are often expected to be selflessly empathetic, often engaging in this second form of empathy without an awareness of the long-term impact. When these unwritten cultural ‘ideals’ are prescribed onto caregivers, despite potential harms, they contribute to high rates of moral injury, emotional exhaustion, and burnout. We praise caregivers for empathetically listening to their patients, but when we over-identify with our patients, we are at risk of vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma occurs when the story of another’s trauma negatively impacts the provider’s identity and beliefs, which when unresolved can lead to cynicism and despair (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

For example, I (Shannon) work as a forensic nurse examiner, which includes working with children who were sexually abused. When I work with children who are similar ages to my own, I am prone to over identify with them and their distraught parent. The more the parent and/or the child reminds me of myself or my children, the more difficult it is to separate my emotions from theirs. The difficulty reflects moral or ethical dissonance, which often feels intense and unresolvable in those moments. When the feelings overwhelm me, I am at risk of dissociating (defined below) from them out of a felt need to serve the patient
with some degree of objectively and fulfill the tasks associated with my forensic nursing role. While it may appear similar to non-attachment, when it comes to these cases, it is more often a subconscious fear-based reaction. As a result, there have been a few cases that still come to mind even a year or two later, unearthing the emotions I felt at the time of working through the case. I have learned over the years that if I over identify, as if myself or a loved one is the victim, and dissociate from the resulting emotions, they get pent up as trauma until I resolve them. When the emotions well up, even years later, I need to take the time to feel and digest them in order to release them.

**Emotional dissociation** occurs when we react by detaching from our emotions to avoid feeling threatened *(fear-based – flight response)*, which limits choice, promotes emotional labour and incongruence. Fleeing from our emotions out of fear *(subconscious reaction)* is not the same as non-attachment, which is when we **consciously take a step back** from our emotions. Conscious action is not pushing them away, rather letting them exist in the background of a larger picture, promoting objectivity and expanding our choices (either removing a stressor or re-orienting ourselves).

When we connect through empathy, we are vulnerable and open, often resulting in an inner change that can shift how we relate to the world; this can be cumulative and permanent, impacting us personally and professionally. Empathy enables us to deeply connect with the experience of others, which has upsides and downsides. The research shows that when we feel connected to another, it can mitigate suffering *(Sturgeon, & Zautra, 2015)*. Sharing our pain or sharing in the pain of another has two benefits, it increases our sense of connection, reducing felt isolation and it promotes an ability to put the situation in perspective, assuming the person we are sharing with provides some objectivity. Furthermore, the person providing empathy benefits by gaining a greater sense of purpose, happiness *(Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008)*, and overall psychological well-being *(Manczak, DeLongis, & Chen, 2016)*. However, by sharing in another's suffering, we are also vulnerable to the stressful aspects of suffering, including a cortisol response and heightened inflammatory profiles *(Manczak, DeLongis, & Chen, 2016)*.

Compounding the stress related impact of sharing in another's suffering, those who are more sensitive (able to read and feel other’s emotions) tend to have a negative bias *(Chikovani, Babuadze, Iashvili, Gvalia, & Surguladze, 2015)*. A negative bias means negative events have a far greater emotional impact on us than positive ones and negative events linger longer than positive ones. People with a negative bias are more likely to pick up on fear and sadness than pleasant emotions; as a result, they are likely prone to empathetic/compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

As a protective factor against vicarious trauma, those who can separate their emotions from the other by focussing on compassion, imagining how another feels rather than imaging ourselves in their shoes, are less likely to suffer the ill effects of overidentifying through empathetic engagement *(Electris, 2013)*. However, depending on our emotional management skills, our tendency toward a negative bias, and if another’s situation reminds us of our own, we may be unable to separate our emotions from another’s. As a result, we are more likely to overly attach, feeling the trauma like it is our own and dissociate from the emotions out of a felt necessity to stay focused on our client’s needs. Finding our unique balance between when we engage in empathy, compassion, or dissociation takes awareness, practice, and self-compassion as we work with our unique tendencies and make adjustments as we go.

**Attuning Practice: Empathy and Me, Harmful or Helpful?**

Is there a way to feel empathy in caregiving work when people are suffering and dying without experiencing vicarious trauma? Absolutely! Engaging in empathy is not always best, depending on our emotional management skills, and our risk of overly identifying with another’s suffering. When mindfully managed, the benefits of empathy can outweigh the risks, and in most cases, will buffer caregivers from
burnout (Wilkinson, Whittington, Perry, & Eames, 2017). However, there are a few important points to be aware. First, it is not helpful to put on an obligatory empathetic display if it doesn’t feel authentic (faking it contributes to the emotional labor described below). Second, if it feels authentic and you can separate your process from the other person’s, mindfully managed empathy will allow you to be present with the person without (figuratively) carrying them home with you or experiencing suffering so deeply that it feels like your own. Through mindfulness, a component of sense of coherence, we can step back from the situation, promoting objectivity, and determine which path is best for us on a case by case basis. If you notice a coping pattern you cannot sufficiently step back from to gain objectivity, it can be helpful to gain an objective perspective from a professional counsellor, trusted colleague, or friend.

Reflect on a situation at work that involved another’s suffering that continues to trigger difficult emotions for you. If you don’t have any of these, this may be a sign that empathy is more helpful than harmful. If you can pull up a case or two, reflect on what made those cases different from another patient’s suffering. Can you recall if there were similarities in your lives, perhaps putting you at risk of over identification? Reflect on how you might engage differently, what would it look like for you to engage compassionately (setting a clear boundary between their pain and your emotions) rather than empathetically (feeling as they feel)? Can you see and feel a difference?

Sometimes, other people’s experiences are too close to home, making it impossible to erect an emotional boundary. In these cases, we can have an emotional safety plan at work. The plan doesn’t have to be formally established, but it is helpful to know how and who we can reach out to for help. For instance, perhaps you can plan to switch patients with a co-worker. If removing yourself from the situation isn’t an option, are there a few colleagues you can debrief with, preventing your own experience of trauma from evolving into unresolved stored trauma/Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

**Emotional Labor in the Workplace: Fake it till you Can’t Take It?**

Emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) is the practice of emoting states of being which are incongruent with our genuine feelings. The labor occurs within the effort of acting different, putting on the cheery face that others expect, even when we are feeling lousy and miserable. In the workplace, too much emotional labour dampens our ability to thrive, because thriving requires authenticity (Maslow, 1987). Authenticity is also a feature of Rogers’ concept of coherence between the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ self (Rogers, 1959). In a meta-analysis of 109 studies, it is clear that incongruent emotional states (surface acting) have a range of negative consequences related to burnout, job satisfaction, the ability to effectively complete work tasks, and caregiver retention rates. Conversely, those who maintain emotional congruence did not incur these same negative consequences (Mesmer-Magnus, DeChurch, & Wax, 2012).

Hochschild (2012) articulated three ways of being and acting that determine the amount of emotional energy used during interactions. The first is surface acting, which burns the greatest amount of energy stores, and represents a disconnection from authentic emotion. Surface-acting is a complete detachment from emotion, which may be done subconsciously as a fear-based coping habit or consciously, knowing that we must display an emotion that is not authentic to how we really feel. A second option, which is more in line with a mindful stepping back, is deep-acting. In a study by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002), surface acting resulted in a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, but when deep acting was employed, employees felt a greater sense of efficacy at work. Deep-acting mitigates emotional exhaustion by making an effort to stay connected to authentic emotion while displaying the emotions that we are work role demands of us. For example, Cherie, a new graduate nurse and research participant, explains how she handles mistakes, which she ties to her ability to connect to her feelings of unconditional acceptance from her mother, buffering her from feeling personally threatened when she makes mistakes at work and enabling her to act from a grounded and objective space:
My mom and I have always been very close, and she has always been a sort of bedrock. My self-acceptance started there…I mean I make mistakes at work, but I don’t really feel bad about it. There is usually something in the environment that enables the mistake to happen, so it is more important to look at what is happening to cause that to happen in the first place. It isn’t all about me. (Dames, 2018)

In a similar situation, where self-esteem may feel threatened, rather than dissociating out of fear, Janice finds strength and authentically connects through her faith, pulling on this strength during difficult work moments. “My faith helps me feel that you know it’s okay, I’ve done what I can to make it right, I’ve changed what I can change, I know I am forgiven, and I can move on” (Dames, 2018).

In addition to surface acting and deep acting, the third option is to express our self authentically, which is neutral to replenishing and is congruent with our perceptions and emotions. The more we have to emote positive emotions while we are experiencing negative ones, the greater surface acting, which leads to incongruence and emotional exhaustion. When surface acting becomes an ingrained work habit, we are at greater risk of burning out. To address the issue, you can learn to use deep acting skills, which mitigate the consequences of incongruence. This ability to deeply act allows for connection to ‘real’ emotions while adhering to the ‘ideal’ cultural display rules. For example, cultivating cheerfulness by thinking about something in your life you are excited about or for which you are feeling grateful, even while you are also feeling tired. Employers that require emotional displays can train employees to deep act, which reduces emotional exhaustion and burnout in the workplace (Tracy, 2005).

Attuning Practice: Deep Acting with THAT thing that makes your Heart Sing

Deep acting is helpful when we must display an emotion that is incongruent with our authentic emotion. The tool applies to all areas of our lives as emotional display expectations are plentiful at work and at home. Deep acting is an alternative to emotional dissociation, where we push our genuine emotions down, disconnecting from our inner world, which can lead to unresolved trauma and subconscious projections. To deeply act we attempt to connect to something or someone that elicits a positive emotion, immersing and savoring it so that we can view the situation through a more loving and flexible lens.

Think about something(s) in your life that makes your heart sing. Perhaps a loved one comes to mind, a pleasant memory, or an event that you are looking forward to. Can you write down a few that will be easy for you to refer to in your time of need? Deep acting takes practice. With intention, you can develop a habit of deep acting, interrupting a tendency to surface act.

At the organizational level, making sure that caregivers’ ‘real’ selves are welcome will reduce the need for us to take on a prescribed ‘ideal’ (surface act), and reduce the amount of unnecessary emotional effort required at work. At the educational level, educators train students to emulate professional comportment standards, but when emotions arise that are incongruent with the prescribed image, students are not prepared to manage the unresolved dissonance that results (Gray, 2008). Professional standards require consistency among members. However, we must strike a better balance to limit surface acting/emotional dissociation and protect emotional energy stores.

Circling back to work through emotions we push aside when surface acting occurs is an important emotional management skill (Russ, 1988; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). When I (Shannon) work with traumatized children, as I described in the section above, I often push my emotions side. This emotional dissociation adds another layer of unresolved trauma I will need to resolve at some future point. If left unresolved, it will continue to haunt me, coming to mind at unpredictable times (can lead to or compound PTSD), adding to my emotional labor, until I heal and digest it. When the burden of emotional labour
overshadows workplace rewards, it causes an effort-reward imbalance (Lewig & Dollard, 2003) – the next stressor I discuss here.

*Projections and the emotions they provoke are our greatest teachers.*

**Effort-Reward Imbalance: Not Worth the Effort**

Caregivers consistently experiencing an effort-reward imbalance may be at a higher risk for adverse health/mental impacts and eventually burnout (Bakker, Killmer, Siegrist, & Schaufeli, 2000; Eriksson & Lindström, 2006; Jesse, Abouljoud, Hogan, & Eshelman, 2015). Based on an international systemic review of effort-reward imbalance among caregivers (Nguyen Van, Dinh Le, Nguyen Van, Nguyen Ngoc, Tran Thi Ngoc, & Nguyen, 2018), there continues to be a high effort-reward imbalance and especially among caregivers with less power in the workplace. For instance, care-aids may have a higher imbalance than registered nurses, and, in turn, registered nurses are likely to have a higher imbalance than physicians. In nursing, the effort-reward imbalance continues to be a major contributing factor to a caregiver’s intent to leave their position (Boamah & Laschinger, 2016). Nurses and other caregivers? with an imbalance toward the effort end of the spectrum will rarely thrive, and many may not remain in the profession (Currie & Carr Hill, 2012). There are many types of rewards (including, but not limited to compensation) and different people value different types of rewards. Some common examples from the literature include taking on satisfying work, establishing a professional identity, feeling a sense of place, and feeling empowered and in control during the workday. These rewards result in greater job satisfaction and retention rates (Zurmehly, Martin, & Fitzpatrick, 2009). A sense of control and empowerment are often lacking in caregiving. As these nurses illustrate, their need for a certain degree of control and predictability (sense of coherence) is threatened:

“They can pull us wherever and it doesn’t matter. I don’t feel heard, and I have no control. I feel like we are pawns that they just toss around however they want.” (Sarah)

“I don’t feel supported because I don’t know the people. I haven’t gotten a good orientation to the places I’m floated to. …I just feel flustered and stressed, and then that impacts how I nurse and how I come across to my co-workers. I feel like I look like this terrible nurse, but I know I’m not. I’m just out of my comfort zone. I just don’t know how they function; I don’t know their routine.” (Janice)

“Staffing is huge, not enough and being redeployed into areas where they don’t have experience.” (Mary)

“[On floors I’m redeployed to], the care aids were totally different; there was no communication, they weren’t answering call bells…there is no floor organization, no flow, no consistency, no senior nurses, lots of new graduates, high turnover, it’s super stressful.” (Sarah)

A felt sense of commitment to contribute the organisational vision and perceived opportunities for promotion also reduce attrition rates (Beecroft, Dorey, & Wenten, 2008; Kovner, Brewer, Greene, & Fairchild, 2009). While some may leave many remain in the profession in a burned-out condition, resulting in workplace hostility (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003).

**Workplace Hostility: Eating Our Young**

Workplace hostility is a result of the shame that emerges from individual incongruence. Carl Jung, a seminal psychologist, called shame as the “soul eating emotion.” If we dig deep enough, under every enduring emotional discomfort, we will often find shame at its roots.

“I’ve had a senior nurse literally say, ‘We always eat our young, I don’t know why we do it, but we do, so get over it.’ The younger nurses were…afraid of being targeted. There is a lot of talking behind people’s
backs. I’ve heard on a few occasions that you can’t speak up because you will be busted for bullying…. people are afraid to say anything; they bully behind the scenes now. …It’s not a safe space at all.” (Tabitha)

The saying that 'nurses eat their young' is a reflection of how our individual shame spills over onto others, and as a result, horizontal violence (hostile and often harmful behavior toward a co-worker) emerges in the workplace. There are several common forms of horizontal violence such as criticizing, belittling, or making hurtful gestures or comments to or about a co-worker in front of others, or intentionally excluding a colleague (Mitchell, Ahmed, & Szabo, 2014). These expressions of co-worker hostility produce stress, resulting from a felt threat to our need for esteem and belonging. Caregivers will find it difficult to thrive in environments where co-workers are hostile to one another.

These novice caregiver statements (Dames, 2018) illustrate the reality of co-worker hostility still “alive and well” in the workplace:

Cherie expressed the hesitation for new nurses who felt “bullied” to come forward, challenging the status quo of keeping quiet about it, as if not resolved it could further threaten their ability to be accepted by the more senior nurses. “…If they bring a complaint against a co-worker and it doesn’t go through…then they aren’t trusted as a co-worker anymore.” (Cherie)

Over-reporting is a form of co-worker hostility. Scrutiny from more senior caregiver can erode self-esteem (primary need). “There is one nurse that follows me all the time, and every little thing that she thinks I missed or did wrong gets reported. I don’t think she was doing it to personally attack me, but it is just who she is as a nurse.” (Candice)

Enculturation in the ways of being of a particular culture begin in our caregiver training. We learn the norms and we learn to play the game if we want to be accepted into that culture (primary need to belong). “…Even the senior nurses on the floor, watching them as a student, they would get shamed for speaking up or saying something. …When you’re a student, you just don’t have the right to stand up for yourself. You just…learn it by being around it. …I fear being publicly shamed. I experienced it as a student; I was publicly shamed in the hallway by two nurses. …One lit into me, and the other stood there, watched, and didn’t say anything. It was because I didn’t chart in a timely manner.” (Mary)

The determining factor, between whether a stimulus is a mere distraction that we can quickly recover from versus a getting completely derailed by it, is our sense of coherence. When we know we have the necessary resources to manage a challenging stimulus, it is less likely to feel threatening. When we do not perceive it as a threat, we can confidently and objectively navigate the challenge, without feeling paralysed by it. Conversely, those with a lower sense of coherence often lack confidence in their ability to manage stimuli, making them more prone to perceive them as a threat; this perceived threat is fueled by shame, further described below. Conversely, a high sense of coherence enables objectivity, promoting a greater capacity to resolve or at least manage feelings of dissonance and the ability to engage or quickly re-engage in thriving (Dames, 2018).

Healthcare culture is known for workers who control its members through homogenizing tactics, such as scrutiny of those who challenge the status quo and by shaming those who threaten the unwritten cultural rules (Cho et al., 2006; Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002; Jacobs & Kyster, 2010; Lively, 2000; Porath & Pearson, 2012; Spence Laschinger et al., 2010). Leininger (1994), a seminal author on healthcare and nursing culture, defined culture as the dominant values, patterns, and normative practices that are transmitted by those that ascribe to the professional role. Nursing culture has become known for putting
nurses at risk for horizontal violence, demonstrated by 85% of nurses reporting they have been victims of incivility (Jacobs & Kyzer, 2010). In a Canadian longitudinal study of 415 novice nurses, one-third reported feeling bullied at least twice per week (Spence Laschinger et al., 2010). Another Canadian study surveying 226 novice nurses, found that nearly 70% of them experienced severe burnout related to negative workplace environments (Cho et al., 2006). Lively (2000) found that senior caregivers who held a higher status had more social support in expressing emotion than those of lower status. Individuals with a higher status set emotional display rules and determine when these displays are appropriate (Lively, 2000; Porath & Pearson, 2012). Individuals who question these power imbalances, disturbing the status quo, may become targets themselves. This pattern is subtly supported by management by discrediting the disturbers in a variety of ways. For example, scrutinizing an employee’s work or publicly ridiculing them, which eventually silences them (Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002). The pressure to maintain the status quo, threatened by those who do not conform to the implicit cultural rules, is a homogenizing force within the healthcare profession.

There are three underlying phenomena worth diving into when it comes to workplace hostility: shame, perfectionism, and homogenization. While homogenization is a process, perfectionism is a disorder, and shame is a weapon of choice for those driven by unconscious and maladaptive needs to control the behaviours and identities of others.

**Shame: When We Don’t Measure Up**

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead to an understanding of ourselves” (Jung).

According to Carl Jung, nearly every enduring irritation we feel about others is a projection of our shadow self and as a result, can be traced back to an unaccepted and therefore unintegrated part of our ‘real’ selves. These unintegrated parts of our ‘real’ self are those parts that we hid (often as children) to ensure that we were loved and accepted by others (basic need). The more of our ‘real’ self that remains in the shadow, the more incongruent we are. When we see a reflection of this hidden part of ourselves in others, it reminds us of our incongruence, which results in shame (Jung, 1970).

Shame is one of the most powerful motivators and disablers in the human experience (Bond, 2009). “In shame, perfection is sought; one is either perfect or a total failure, one does not experience anything in between” (Bond, 2009, p. 134). Among many caregivers, shame occurs when socially prescribed ‘ideal’ is incongruent with our ‘real’ self, resulting in moral injury. The socially prescribed ‘ideal’ is the display rules of how to professionally ‘know, be and do,’ and in caregiving professions, they often become entwined and confused with our ‘real’ values. For example, caregivers such as counsellors, nurses, and physicians wear their professional identities in and out of the workplace. Among their friends, family, and community groups, they are nurses and physicians, even when they aren’t formally wearing that hat. Caregivers rarely get to take their professional hat off. Because of the enmeshing of ours professional and personal life, if expected to put on a cheerful and stoic display at work, even when they feel grumpy and uneasy inside, they are likely to mirror these same incongruent displays in their personal life. The enmeshing of professional display rules and personal values corresponds with Rogers’ (1986) concept of congruence and provides insight into why feelings of not measuring up to professional ideals may correspond with intense feelings of personal shame.

Toward solutions to shame, Brown (2006) described the core skills to resolve it as an ability to validate and practice self-compassion, a critical awareness of socially prescribed ‘ideals’, and attaining relationships that promote an ability to talk about shame, enabling it to surface, to be processed, and to be released.
Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. (Fred Rogers)

The afformentioned recommendations complement the fundamental components of sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). Those with a high sense of coherence score are more self-aware, have nurturing support systems, and feel they can manage and diffuse stressful stimuli. Workplaces that provide an opportunity to reflect on shaming when it occurs will be more likely to expose the socially prescribed 'ideals' at its roots (Jahromi, Naziri, & Barzegar, 2012).

**Perfectionism: The Pressure to Perform**
Perfectionism is the driving force behind co-worker hostility. Maladaptive perfectionism and particularly socially prescribed perfectionism can create toxically stressful environments for those who do not fit neatly into the status quo (Jahromi et al., 2012). Current healthcare culture often promotes tendencies toward perfectionism; as a result, high levels of anxiety and depression are commonplace (Jahromi et al., 2012).

Perfectionism comes in many forms, and many people slip in and out of it. Striving for perfection is not always negative as it can be a motivating factor to complete work and produce the best product (Ellis, 2002). Those who are adaptive and self-oriented as opposed to socially prescribing their ideals onto others are often self-motivated, high achieving, able to adapt to obstacles that may delay achievements, and find satisfaction from their accomplishments (Ellis, 2002). The downside of perfectionism is the natural inclination to hold others to the same idealistic standards, which can cause unreasonably high expectations (Melrose, 2011). Detrimental mental health effects can occur when we cannot meet challenges (Melrose, 2011). These health effects correlate with fears of criticism and failure and when left unaddressed can lead to moral injury, emotional exhaustion, and eventual burnout (Chang, 2012; Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996; Sevlever & Rice, 2010).

Relating perfectionism to emotional management, its more extreme forms lead to dissociation from emotions, characterized by ignoring and internalizing fears of worthlessness, shame, and failure (Petersson, Perseius, & Johnsson, 2014; Shafran, Cooper, & Fairburn, 2002). This habitually defensive way of being will cause an overall lower tolerance for exposure to stress (Ellis, 2002; Petersson et al., 2014). In addition, perfectionism and sense of coherence (SOC) inversely link (Rennemark & Hagberg, 1997); those who have a low sense of coherence score have higher perfectionism scores; therefore, improving sense of coherence buffers us from extreme forms of perfectionism (Rennemark & Hagberg, 1997). Extreme forms of perfectionism lead to self-destructive behaviours, which extend into prescribing the same unrealistic expectations onto others (a phenomenon called socially prescribed perfectionism). Socially prescribed perfectionism uses shaming tactics to pressure others to live up to unrealistically high standards and has toxic effects on workplace morale, resulting in a chronic workplace stressor.

**Homogenization: No Snowflakes Allowed**
While we can all resonate with the idea that there is indeed beauty in our individuality and how our differences can contribute to a rich and diverse workforce, when enculturated in homogenizing environments, we develop a fear of otherness. The fear and the homogenizing tendencies that follow are a natural outcome of our professional upbringing. We homogenize each other by shaming those who threaten the established culture (Adamson & Clark, 1999). Refusing to acknowledge otherness is the fuel that sustains cultural homogenization (Palmer, Zajonc, & Scribner, 2010). Homogenization is a “lose-lose” process: those who advocate for diversity become vulnerable to scrutiny, but those who comply with assimilation often feel unsettled and ambiguous (incongruent). Chronic denial or suppression of our ‘real’
self to assimilate produces incongruence and is a barrier to thriving (Rogers, 1959). Palmer et al. (2010) suggested that, in homogenizing cultures, diversity produces implicit fears of conflict, which further pushes differences into shadows and makes them even more divisive. High expectations (perfectionism) in nursing fuel homogenization. In a way, this form of hostility is the dark side of perfectionism in the profession.

Maintaining peer approval and acceptance is a fundamental part of the human condition, both regarding psychological well-being and long-term physical health impacts (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2009). In healthcare, garnering the approval of our work team and especially senior members who implicitly set the cultural tone, is often a matter of career survival; as a result, the more vulnerable members (those who fall outside of the status quo) rarely challenge homogenization.

Homogenization and perfectionism are cyclical and mutually reinforcing. Extreme forms of perfectionism incubate in homogenizing cultures where we learn to view the world through a black and white lens with little tolerance for shades of grey. Similarly, cultural homogenization is fueled by perfectionistic individuals who have learned to prescribe their unrealistically high expectations (‘ideals’) onto others.

Physical Violence: A Disturbing New Normal
Physical violence is a common concern in many healthcare environments (Gates, Gillespie, & Succop, 2011; Roche, Diers, Duffield, & Catling-Paull, 2010). Cherie, a novice caregiver and research participant, was surprised and disempowered by how common it is for patients to physically hurt nurses at work (Dames, 2018):

*The amount of violence I see is so much more than I was expecting. Also thinking of reporting it, what are they going to do? The report will go back to my [manager], and they will say, ‘well he has dementia,’ and then it is normalized. It just seems pointless to report it...nothing is going to change.* (Cherie)

Safety is a human need. The unmet need for safety in caregiving occupations is a major issue. Research shows that many caregivers working in acute care areas experience violence in the workplace which has detrimental effects on their mental health and their ability to care for their patients (Gates, Gillespie, & Succop, 2011; Roche et al., 2010). Frequent experiences of violence lead to a normalization of violence, where staff feel unable to resolve the threat and therefore accept it as “a part of the job”. The normalization of physical violence prevents many healthcare workers from feeling safe in the work environment (Gates, Gillespie, & Succop, 2011; Roche, Diers, Duffield, & Catling-Paull, 2010). These feelings of threat will at least distract and may even disable workers from thriving. Typically, the first one or two violent events trigger an acute stress response, which then commonly evolves into similar events being dismissed as normal, often cloaked in humor. While the normalization of this threat may resolve the intensity of the stress, it does not resolve its lingering effects. Stress elicited by frequent violent events precipitates long-term mental and physical health consequences.

Stress elicited by frequent violent events precipitates long-term mental and physical health consequences.

In order for the caregiver to reflect, process emotions, and articulate themselves, they need time, and space away from the high stimulus healthcare environment, as well as the awareness and tools to facilitate these activities. Unfortunately, heavy workloads and the normalization of the violence may prevent caregivers from finding the time or to recognize their need to resolve this common stressor.

Heavy Workloads: Too Busy to Breathe
One study performed in 2004 amongst 393 nurses representing many work sites in the United States, found that less than half of them could take any uninterrupted breaks during a typical 12-hour shift (Rogers, Hwang, & Scott, 2004). For new nurses, it is common practice to miss breaks and stay late to keep up with
the caregiving workloads in health care, which is typically the same volume for newer providers as their more experienced colleagues (Lea & Cruickshank, 2017; Rhéaume et al., 2011). Because they lack experience, these new caregivers often need to double-check their decisions, which is a necessary safeguard against mistakes. However, the employer may not acknowledge the workload associated with these extra steps. In my own career, I’ve observed that employers often do not take learning curves into account when assigned workload to novice caregivers, expecting them to carry workloads equal to those of more experienced employees. As a result, new caregivers become even less likely to take breaks and often fear scrutiny (shame) if they fail to carry the same workload of their more experienced colleagues.

Heavy workloads contribute to unmet needs because caregivers are missing breaks, working long hours, and being unable to find space away from the stimuli to address mental and physical requirements. Caregivers are unlikely to thrive in the workplace as long as these needs go unmet.

**Impacts of Chronic Stress**

Even when the many stressors mentioned in the sections above are absent, and the workplace is generally healthy and happy, working in high stakes (life or death) and high stimulus (multiple demands, interruptions, constant alarms and call bells ringing, patients and family members calling out for help, multiple people moving around, and fast paced and rapidly changing activities) work environments will often produce stress. For example, a nurse may question their decision, which if wrong could have life or death consequences, but not feel they have the time to double check it, as other patients in peril are in need of immediate care. As described in Part I, those with higher sense of coherence will be more likely to experience stressors as momentary distractors from thriving, rather than feeling completely derailed by them. However, there are certain weather conditions (external stressors) that must be managed. For instance, in a study comparing General Ward nurses and Neonatal Intensive Care nurses, the higher the stakes in the work environment the higher the levels of cortisol/stress felt among workers (Fujimaru, Okamura, Kawasaki, Kakuma, Yoshii, & Matsuishi, 2012). Another study by Vessey, Demarco, and DiFazio (2010) found that the frequency and rates of co-worker hostility had detrimental effects on the psychological and physical health of nurses. As a result, it negatively affected job satisfaction, retention rates, quality of care, and patient outcomes.

Most of us can relate to the mental impacts that stress has on the ability to think and cope; however, we may be less aware of the long-term mental and physical risks we may face if stress is unaddressed. High stress levels correlate with endocrine and immune dysfunction, lower vaccine responses, cardiovascular disease, rheumatoid arthritis, delayed wound healing, and rapid disease progression (Baum, Cohen, & Hall, 1993; Castle, Wilkins, Heck, Tanzy, & Fahey, 1995; Dickerson, Kemeny, Aziz, Kim, & Fahey, 2004; Dickerson et al., 2009; Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002; Smith & Zautra, 2002). These sustained feelings of stress are a significant health issue leading to burnout if unaddressed (Cowin & Hengstberger-Sims, 2006; Deary, Watson, & Hogston, 2003; Garrosa et al., 2011; Luthans & Jensen, 2005).

**Burnout**

Burnout is a state of chronic occupational emotional overload (Thunman, 2012) or a “state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's ability to perform” (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 1996, p. 20). The pathological components of burnout overlap with those of clinical depression (Bianchi, Schonfeld & Laurent, 2015). Burnout is considered the single most common occupational health hazard second only to muscle skeletal injuries. Further, burnout is estimated to have doubled in incidence in the last ten years (Thunman, 2012).
Incongruence, often resulting in moral injury, is a primary contributor to burnout. The less caregivers can authentically express themselves and their emotions, the more they experience shame, the more emotional dissociation and dissonance, and the more likely they will develop anxiety and depression. Depressed and anxious caregivers are less able to manage the emotions, and the resulting burnout is almost a guarantee.

Novice caregivers who leave the profession commonly report they left because of burnout (Suzuki, Tagaya, Ota, Nagasawa, Matsuura, & Sato, 2010). Research suggests the stressors leading to burnout may begin in the undergraduate experience. Nurses who experience at school are at significantly higher risk of leaving their position after only 10 to 15 months (Rudman & Gustavsson, 2012). According the World Health Organization, caregiver burnout is a global issue (Perry, Presley-Cantrell, & Dhingra, 2012) that will require a widespread effort (aiming at both the roots and the weather) to address. One person’s burnout has a ripple effect, extending to the surrounding staff who have to cope with diminished workplace morale, and who often take on extra workload due to high rates of attrition and absenteeism.

Deflated Morale
Many caregivers who suffer from emotional exhaustion and burnout remain in the field but develop chronic feelings of hostility (Schaufeli and Buunk, 2003). When employees continue to work in a burned-out condition, it causes ripple effects of adverse consequences for themselves, work teams, and clients (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). This scenario circles back to co-worker hostility, referred to above, with caregivers hurting each other and perpetuating the cycle of hostility in the workplace. Homogenizing cultures, as described above, further diminishes morale because it prevents employees from feeling safe to express their ‘real’ self when it does not align with the prescribed ‘ideals’. As a result, they often repress personality qualities that stand out from the status quo, leading to further shame and diminished morale.

Taking Personality into Account
Caregivers that work in an environment of their choosing, that is congruent with their personality, are at a lower risk of leaving their job (Beecroft et al., 2008). Personality traits influence our ability to navigate workplace stimuli, which makes personality a significant factor in our burnout risk (Geuens, Braspenning, Van Bogaert, & Franck, 2015; Hakanen & Bakker, 2016; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). For example, Geuens et al. (2015) found that caregivers with a type D personality typing are five times more likely to burn out, even when taking job-related factors into account. The type D personality, which shares the same traits as those with low sense of coherence scores, tends toward pessimism, emotional suppression, and often assumes that the worst-case scenario will unfold. Keeping in mind that we all have days with those tendencies, for the type D personality this is a norm. Perhaps related to their high degree of emotional suppression is the degree of emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012) that they are managing inside and outside of work (I explain emotional labor above). Those with low sense of coherence, the most vulnerable to the workplace stimulus, are likely to spend more time surface acting, which is the practice of putting on an emotional display incongruent with authentic emotions and as a result, use their energy stores rapidly. If they then are a more vulnerable personality type, they are at a disadvantage compared to their peers. Those who are vulnerable because of specific personality traits are more sensitive to stress, prone to negative self-talk, and maladaptive coping behaviors. Conversely, those with less trait vulnerability can endure more workplace stimuli before they trigger a stress response (Geuens et al., 2015). Another example of the influence of personality is that extroverted personality types who gain energy from social interactions and because of this, they have a greater tendency to thrive in highly stimulating environments, buffering them from negative workplace events (Clark & Watson, 1999). Finally, our personality typing is not set in stone as an excuse to label and limit us. Our personality results from various factors related to our nature and
nurture (root development) and can change with time and through the personal development work described in this curriculum.

*The essence of who we are is not always well reflected in the personality typing we have been conditioned to take on.*

**A Recap**

The factors outlined in this chapter align with Antonovsky’s (1979) concept of sense of coherence and the ability to develop assets that improve our confidence and ability to manage stimuli before they become stressors. These factors, both the weather and the state of our roots, interplay and compound to enable and disable our ability to thrive at work. Chronically stressful work environments, where external stimuli are extreme and unrelenting (unmanaged weather), leads to moral injury, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and as a result, high attrition rates (Beecroft, Kunzman, & Krozek, 2001).

Developing assets that enable caregivers to establish deeper roots (Figure 1), where they are less threatened by the external stimuli/weather, promotes an ability to thrive as individuals, which then contribute to flourishing work environments. Many stimuli/stressors are not changeable, such as a certain degree of ambiguity/unpredictability that comes with the work in acute care environments. However, by focussing on cultivating and deepening our roots, we can better prepare ourselves for the stress that is endemic in the field.

A perceived unmet need produces stress; this emerges from the belief we are not ‘good enough’ to attain what we need to survive, to be safe, to be loved, and to belong. In this curriculum, we practice mindfulness, developing habits the enable us to sink into our own root systems, grounding us in the reality that we are ‘good enough’ just as we are; that every resource we need to manage the passing weather is available when we learn to connect to the love and wisdom that is available when we drop into our roots. Sense of coherence (including mindfulness) and congruence (including self-compassion), are the path toward, and the result of, learning how to access the rich resources and wisdom within our roots.

**Attuning Practice: How are your Roots?**

This curriculum is a beginning; a journey; a new way of orienting ourselves to our inner and outer world. Each reflective activity, developmental practice, and future direction activity requires a willingness to be vulnerable, to take two steps forward and to be open to learning when we take a step back. Remember, practice is for progress, not perfection. Practice enables habits, and habits enable intuitive routines, and intuitive routines enable us to move from effort to ease.

*“Wholeness does not mean perfection; it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life”* (Palmer, 2004).

Reflection is an opportunity to develop awareness and acceptance of our unique belief systems, values, and the resources and/or barriers that impact our ability to practice self-compassion and to engage in thriving. If we are not aware of our core values, we will lack the confidence necessary to make important decisions. Similarly, if we cannot articulate our vulnerabilities, we cannot manage them. Gaining self-awareness improves our sense of coherence. We cultivate self-awareness through mindfulness practices.

*“You will come to see that strong reactions are like a weather system that swoops in, stays for a while, and eventually dissipates. Embodied presence cultivates a wise and compassionate relationship with the reactions rather than judging, rejections, or drowning in the experience”* (Brach, 2018).
Using Figure 1, consider the current state of your roots and how they impact your perception of the weather. Think about where you are now in terms of congruence (how aligned your real and ideal are), and sense of coherence (meaningfulness, a sense of understanding and predictability in your days, and your ability to manage stressors and emotions). What unmet needs seem to haunt/threaten you? Are you immune to criticism but open to feedback? Do you know what matters to you (when to let things go and when to assert yourself)?
Attuning Practice: Connecting Emotional States with Congruence

Before we begin, as a reminder, it is important to note we are all different. Our brain chemistries, our past experiences, our projections, and vulnerabilities, they are all vastly different! Exercises are not prescriptions, rather, they are tools to try and for you to decide if it resonates. Reflection after each practice is the most important part of the practice; it is here that we come to know ourselves, what engages our hearts and minds (including our desires to continue with certain practices). Be mindful of what comes up for you with each practice, let go of what isn’t sticking and hold onto what is.
After you practice, sit for a moment. Choose a word or phrase that describes how you feel. Taking notice after each practice will help you decipher what tools/practices resonate with you. Those that resonate will promote connection and the ability to rest in the inner world. Hold the tool lightly, as in time, another tool may call you. When you need it most, the right practice will call. Your job is to take notice when it whispers, answer the call, and trust the process as you take on a new practice. Building awareness and focusing on the benefits of these mindfulness and medication practices will remind and motivate you to pull the most helpful practice out of your tool belt when you need them most!

This Practice is about awareness building, enabling us to connect feelings of anxiety and/or depression with moments of incongruity. In Robert Bly’s ‘Long Bag’ he describes how incongruences develop, often in childhood, and then on into our adult years.

*When we were one or two years old we had what we might visualize as a 360-degree personality. Energy radiated out from all parts of our body and all parts of our psyche. A child running is a living globe of energy. We had a ball of energy, all right; but one day we noticed that our parents didn’t like certain parts of that ball. They said things like: “Can’t you be still?” Or “It isn’t nice to try and kill your brother.” Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don’t like, we, to keep our parents’ love, put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large. Then our teachers have their say: “Good children don’t get angry over such little things.” So we take our anger and put it in the bag.” …Our bags were already a mile long. Then we do a lot of bag-stuffing in high school. This time it’s no longer the evil grownups that pressure us, but people our own age…Different cultures fill the bag with different contents. We spend our life until we’re twenty deciding what parts of ourself to put into the bag, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again. (Bly, 1989)*

We all experience incongruence, the goal is be more aware/mindful when we are acting out of our ‘real’ values and desires, as opposed to prescribed ideals. When we re-orient ourselves, coming from a place of desire or ‘want to’ as opposed to a felt obligation or ‘have to’ we can then connect to our inner resources; we engage in thriving. Mindfulness opens the door to this choice by enabling openness and objectivity. **Mindfulness has two primary components:** (1) bringing attention to the moment by moving from the thinking mind to the sensing mind and (2) cultivating curiosity and openness. These components enable objectivity as we step back (non-attachment) and accept whatever arises.

Congruence requires a willingness to trust our inner resources, to act in ways true to who we are, despite our fears of being rejected by others. With repetition, trust develops, knowing our inner voice has our best interests in mind. What was uncomfortable becomes familiar, even comforting. The emotions that arise no longer threaten us, rather they become our guideposts, connecting us to desire and alerting us when incongruence creeps in. As we retrieve those parts of ourselves that were once in the shadows, we feel whole; this is congruence.

**Attuning Practice: Incongruent Tendencies**

This exercise provides an opportunity to take stock in our tendencies toward congruence/incongruence. With awareness comes choice and choice is the doorway to congruence. Using the chart below, adapted from Higgins et al. (1985), list about 10 qualities about your ‘ideal’ self, those ideal qualities that represent what you feel would represent your best self (your ultimate goals). *For example, for me, my ‘ideal’ self is smart, kind, generous, etc.*
Then list about 10 qualities that represent what you and/or others think you should possess. *For example, I often think others think I ’should’ be selfless, kind, slow to speak, composed, classy, etc.* Then list about 10 qualities (positive and negative) that you actually possess. *For example, I am actually kind, spontaneous, quick to speak, etc.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Ideal self’</th>
<th>‘should/ought’ self</th>
<th>‘Real’/actual self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~ 10 qualities in each column</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Count the matches on the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ columns and then count those that mismatch (opposites). Minus the number of matches from the mismatches.

b) Now, in the ‘real’ and ‘should’ column, do the same as above.

This exercise illuminates our inner conflicts between our ‘real’ self, compared to the ‘ideal’ self that we think, or we think others want us to be. The greater discrepancies, represented by a higher score, between the ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ the more vulnerable you are to feelings of depression. The more discrepancies between the ‘should/ought’ and ‘real’ columns, the higher your score will be and the more vulnerable you are to feelings of anxiety.

When we recognize the connection between our emotional states and our incongruent thought patterns, we have an opportunity to re-frame our thinking. Use the exercise to help make visible this connection.

The next time you notice anxiety or discontentment bubble up, consider the root causes of your incongruence. Ask yourself: *“What’s behind my feelings of incongruence (anxiety and discontentment)?”*

**Strengthening Practice: Developing Awareness through Mindfulness**

*“Fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks; but fear the man who has practiced the same kick 10,000 times”* (Bruce Lee).

We dive into mindfulness in Part V, but starting now, via small and frequent efforts, we can integrate mindful habits into our daily activities. There is no need to close your eyes or to find a special place to do the practice, we can engage in mindfulness as part of our busy lives by using reminders within our daily routines, cueing us to attend to the present moment.

*Mindfulness is achieved by transitioning from our thinking mode, where we are lost in past and future thoughts, to the sensing mode, where we are taking in the world in and around us.*
If you forget or your mind wanders during this mindfulness exercise, practice self-compassion by reminding yourself that everyone struggles with focus and mental ‘noise.’ Practice focusing on progress, not perfection. Sessions that are wrought with distractions are an excellent investment in our progress. In fact, the times when our minds are the most caught up in thoughts, it is an excellent time to practice shifting into sensing mode. When sessions are difficult, pat yourself on the back for choosing a great time to help your brain relax! The act of consistently bringing our attention back to the practice trains our brains to sustain longer periods of mindfulness.

**Bring your attention to** your environment. Start by picking one reoccurring event you see or do each day (e.g. brushing your teeth, feeding your cat, eating breakfast, afternoon coffee, each time you enter or exit your house or office, etc.). This is an environment cue that will remind you to practice mindfulness each time the cue appears in your environment.

**Bring your attention to a new detail** while you are doing this activity, something new that you have not noticed before. Take the experience in through yours senses, cultivating curiosity.

**Bring your attention to your senses,** feel the touch points, where your body comes into contact with itself or external objects, such as the floor connecting to the bottoms of your feet. Relax those parts that feel tension such as relaxing your shoulders away from your ears, letting go of tension that may be held in your belly. Now feel your spine lengthen, beginning at the soles of your feet, feel yourself lift and lengthen.

**Bring your attention to your breath.** Take a breath in, imagining the fresh air moving deeply into your chest and throughout your body. As you exhale, imagine the stale air moving out, carrying out the old thought patterns and old areas stored up stress with it. Continue to take a few deeper and longer breaths (4-5 seconds), focusing on fully expanding, bringing in the new air, letting it cleanse all of the nooks and crannies of your body and mind, paying special attention to move it into areas of tension; fully expire, letting it carry out old areas of stress and ways of being that are no longer serving you.

**Bring your attention to how you feel.** Take notice of how you feel physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Practice accepting what IS; letting go a need to resist uncomfortable emotions and any need to control or change things. By accepting without condition, we can step into the NOW with patience, free of subjective judgments (non-attachment). As a result, we will learn to enjoy mindfulness, which motivates us to incorporate it in all areas of our lives.

*Intense emotions can cause us to avoid mindfulness, prompting us to grasp onto external distractions. Review the tips to manage intense emotions (Part VI and Part VIII), enabling us to recognize and address unresolved areas of trauma that bubble up when we bring presence to our senses/emotions.*

**Clearing Practice: Chakras**
In the west, the consideration that chakras impact mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health is relatively new and lacks familiarity and research. However, a few studies show a significant connection between one’s spiritual connection, as reflected in chakra theory, and the expression of physiological and psychological pathologies (Curtis, Zeh, Miller, & Sequoyah, & Rich, 2004; Drapkin, McClintock, Lau, & Miller, 2016). In the many areas of the east, chakras are a significant contributor to spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing. In Sanskrit, the term chakra means wheel, representing the symbiotic and holistic nature of the energy centers in our bodies.

*Out of respect to the culture from which Chakra practices emerged, a great deal will be lost in translation as we attempt to transplant the practice into our western context. For this curriculum, I touch*
on the concept of Chakras. For those who want to go deeper, I encourage you to research its roots and to find a mentor able to honor its cultural origins.

While there are many Chakra models, a commonly adopted model in the west describes seven core energy centers, each of which has its own vibrational frequency and function that contributes to wellness. Much like a river that becomes stagnant when unable to flow, when energy blockages occur, diseases can fester. Even if you don’t resonate with Chakras, guided meditations are a great way to develop concentration, enabling you to sustain mindfulness. Furthermore, the loving-kindness component is an excellent way to cultivate self-compassion. The below meditation script provides an opportunity to attune with and then work toward clearing blockages that result from self-destructive belief systems and accumulated stress and trauma.

With permission to use, this adapted Chakra Script was originally created by Linda Hall (2019), a well established Integrative Health Practitioner and meditation teacher.

Allow your eyes to comfortably close, and come down into your breath, into your body, relaxing your belly, softening your mind.

Feel the support beneath you, connect with the ground below. And let it take your weight.

Become aware of the sounds around you - let them be there.

Notice the light and shade, the air touching the surface of your body.

Sense the sky above, and the horizons stretching all the way round you, the earth below, supporting you. Allow your mind to empty what it no longer needs to hold on to, let it go, flow out and away. Allow your body to release what it no longer needs to hold on to, let it go, flow out and away.

Draw yourself back from where you’ve been in your day. Draw your energies back home to your centre. Ground yourself in this moment, here.

Begin to sense the space around you. Breathe with the space and become aware of the rise and fall of your breath, its coming and going, the sensation, sound, temperature.

Breathe down to where the weight of your body rests, below the base of your spine – to your root - your Chakra of Belonging. Breathe into your Root. Let it soften and gently expand on your breath, taking in nourishment and life force energy.

Allow your Root to connect down, down to ground below, deep into the earth. And invite in the colour red – the colour of the earth. Bathe your Root with red: empowering, embodying, grounding you in the ‘here and now’. Let your Root take what it needs. And say the words: “I am here” “I have a right to be here, as I am”, “The Earth supports me”. While you focus on flooding your root Chakra with red, repeat to yourself, “I am safe.”

When you are ready, allow your awareness to move up to your abdomen, just below your navel- your
chakra of emotional intelligence, choice, creativity, movement and pleasure.

Breathe into the soft part of your abdomen, let it gently soften and expand on your breath, taking in nourishment and life force energy. And invite in orange – the colour of the setting sun, Bathe your abdomen with orange, balancing, empowering, motivating. Let your abdomen be fed and say the words: “I honour my needs”, “I allow myself to be nourished”. As you flood your abdomen with orange, repeat the mantra “I am worthy.”

And when you are ready move your awareness up to the soft area below your breast bone, – to your Solar Plexus - your chakra of personal power.

Breathe into here, allowing your solar plexus to soften and expand on your breath. And invite in the colour yellow – the colour of sunshine. Bathe your Solar Plexus with sunshine, replenishing, restoring, nurturing. Letting your Solar Plexus take what it needs. As you say the words, “I value myself” “I am enough.” As you flood your Solar Plexus with yellow, repeat the mantra, “I am more than enough”

When you are ready bring your awareness up to the centre of your chest - to your Heart – your chakra of self-development and unconditional love.

Gently breathe into your Heart, letting it soften and expand on your breath. And invite in green - the colour of spring, or rose pink – whichever feels right. Bathe your heart centre with nourishment, renewal, healing. Let your Heart take what it needs and say the words “I am greatly loved”. “I allow myself to give and receive love freely”. “I am nourished by the power of love”. As you flood your Heart Chakra with the color green, feel it fill with love and repeat the mantra, “I am love.”

In your own time, move up to your neck – to your Throat - your chakra of self-expression and personal will.

Allow your throat centre to soften, expand and b-r-e-a-t-h-e. Inviting in blue – the colour of sky. Breathe sky into your throat centre, clearing, opening, softening the need for control, freeing self-expression and creativity. Let your Throat take what it needs. And say the words “I hear and speak my truth”, “I express myself freely”. “I allow myself to go with the flow of life”. As you fill your Throat Chakra with the color of the sky, repeat the mantra “my truth is worthy of expression.”

When you are ready, take your focus up to your forehead - between your eye brows - to your Third Eye – your chakra of wisdom and intuition, gently allowing it to soften, expand, and breathe.

Inviting in indigo - the velvety colour of night sky. Bathe your Third Eye with indigo, soothing, balancing, bringing clarity, insight and understanding. Let your Third Eye take what it needs. And say the words: “Everything is unfolding as it should”. As you connect to your inner wisdom, flood your Third Eye with indigo, repeating the mantra “I am light.”

Moving up, in your own time, to the top of your head- to your Crown, your chakra of ‘oneness’ allowing your Crown to breathe.

And gently invite in a light violet, softly bathing your Crown, balancing, restoring, harmonising. Let your
Crown take what it needs. And say the words “I am one with the Universe”. “I am one with the Whole”.

When you are ready come back to yourself as a whole, back to the ebb and flow of your breath, back to your centre. Breathe in to your core. And say the words “I am whole”. “I am perfect just as I am”. As you connect with the divine (or your higher self if you prefer), fill your Crown Chakra with a soft violet color, repeating the mantra, “I am.”

Allow the energy of the words to bathe your body, mind, emotions, spirit. And take what you need.

And, in your own time become aware of the air on the surface of your body. The sounds around you, near and in the distance.

Close your chakras down a little - just having the intention is enough. Become aware of the support beneath you. Notice how you feel. And hold yourself with loving kindness, for the beautiful, unique being that you are.

When you are ready you can draw this meditation to a close.

Adapted from the Chakra Healing Guided Meditation Script by Linda Hall. Copyright protected. Originally published by www.The-Guided-Meditation-Site.com

Aligning Practice: Dropping in to Set a Goal/Intention
Setting goals/intentions is how we choose a place to plant our seeds of change and a way in which we prepare the soil to provide the most nurturing environment for successful growth. Reflect on a writing that resonates with you, inspiring you to turn off the head chatter of what you ‘should do’ and into your heart’s desire, aligning with what you were uniquely born to do. For example, the below passage by Richard Wagamese (2016)…

I am my silence. I am not the busyness of my thoughts or the daily rhythm of my actions. I am not the stuff that constitutes my world. I am not my talk. I am not my actions. I am my silence. I am the consciousness that perceives all these things. When I go to my consciousness, to that great pool of silence that observes the intricacies of my life, I am aware that I am me. I take a little time each day to sit in silence so that I can move outward in balance into the great clamour of living. (Wagamese, 2016)

…and the adapted passage below by Andrew Kemp (2019), which can help inspire an intention to surrender, to drop in, and step out with courage, trusting in one’s inner and outer resources to support the journey. If the spiritual terminology is a stumbling block for you, pay attention to your intuition and adapt the passage to ensure it is congruent with your belief system.

My Beloved,
I pray to you with all the passion, desire, and humility of my heart and soul
Please help me remember your Divine Love
Please help me feel and release all my emotional wounds that keep me from living in love
My fear, my Anger, my grief, my judgement and my shame.
I choose to embrace them, now
with your support
So that I may transmute them into love itself.
Please help me release my doubts and distractions, my denials, my avoidance strategies, my weaknesses, my capacity to live in ignorance and superficial comfort.
I choose to be courageous and embrace all that I have never dared embrace before, knowing that this will take me closer to You and Your love.
Please help me now, with these heartful desires.

My beloved,
please help me stand in my power and truth.
Please help me embrace all the joys and gifts of my masculinity and femininity; all the positive aspects of my gender.
Please help me release all memories, ancestral wounds, and social programming that keep me from the highest manifestations of this potential.

My beloved,
I want to know your will.
Please show me, inspire me to find my Divine life purpose; how I may best live in love, in whatever form that may present: not through duty or guilt, but for the sheer joy of doing so.

My beloved,
I desire with all my heart to come closer to you, to live in your loving embrace every minute of the day and night, to feel your love and truth holding me strong.

I desire to live through my heart, as the window to my soul.
With my mind as my servant, not my master.
Please support me with your Divine Love and grace in all that I do.
Please help me be a beacon of light and an inspiration to others.

Help me remember that you are with me and guide me in love, now and always.
Amen. (Adapted, Original Version by Kemp, 2019)

Now that you have dropped in, set an intention to align with a higher calling (beyond cultural prescriptions/ideals), choose one or two goals you long to achieve by going through this learning, practice, and development process. Go inside to determine where you WANT to be, not where you think you should be, or where you think others think you should be, but where you DESIRE to be. This exercise requires a willingness to immerse in your inner world for answers, as opposed to drawing on the opinions of others or the culture that surrounds us.

GOAL

TIP: By feeling a sense of desire and ownership for your goals and by writing them down you are more likely to achieve them. As soon as a goal feels obligatory, subconscious resistance will creep in. It is unnecessary to effort greatly or force results; in fact, gentleness is an important quality of self-compassion, trusting that when we are ready, the answers to our questions will bubble up from inside us. Releasing the
need to control and trusting the inner voice will help you craft goals that bring you more meaning and that you are more likely to achieve.

We can cultivate our ability to hear the inner voice, leaning into it with our awareness, our breath, and by immersing deeply through loving-kindness practices.

*Loving-kindness emerges from grace and is characterized by gentleness, consideration, and kindness to ourselves and others.*

If the answers don’t come right away, or if you are having difficulty staying dropped into your inner world, remember that focus takes practice, and that every practice session is an investment in your progress. If frustration arises, take the opportunity to practice self-kindness much like you would coach a friend or young child who is learning something for the first time. As you build a relationship with yourself, trust will develop, a yearning to connect will call you in. Hold your questions lightly, trusting that the answers will come at the right time and in the right way. This process takes time, it takes self-kindness, and it takes courage.

**The Journey Ahead**

Such personal work is not new, rather it reflects what it means to be human, and as such, we all walk this path together. Thus far, we have explained why we as caregivers, as humans, must have our basic needs tended to and how congruence and sense of coherence promote such tending. Going forward, you will find suggestions and practices that promote the ability for you to be your most compassionate and authentic self. Lean in and trust the process, enabling your inner wisdom to guide you and re-orient you on a new trajectory. Now that we have *come to know* the common human needs, the impetus of stress (a threat to our needs) and the core assets of thriving (congruence and sense of coherence), we will take the knowing deeper by *attuning* (applying to self), *strengthening* (accessing inner resources), *clearing* (working through trauma), and *aligning* (calling and vision). The process requires you to move from depending on your felt need to figure things out, to surrendering to the unknown and aligning with a more intuitive and heartful knowing. We will:

- Come to know by exploring the research, focusing in on the requirements of thriving.
- Attune with the inner world by learning to let the outer world fall into the background. Learning to drop in enables us to distinguish signal (components that resonate) versus noise (the distractions that pull at our attention).
- Strengthen via practices that integrate congruence (including self-compassion), and sense of coherence (including mindfulness) are key development factors that impact our ability to thrive. We will better understand how sense of coherence and congruence impact caregivers and caregiving work environments.
- Clear out our inner space by developing tools and techniques to re-orient old belief systems and resolve areas of incongruence and trauma.
- Align with our calling, vision, and leadership potential by engaging in practices that attune and strengthen our ability to connect to and empower our ‘real’ self.
PART III: Nurturing Congruence with Self-Compassion

“Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it” (Rumi).

This section is about congruence, how self-compassion nurtures congruence, and how you can tap into that self-compassion to build congruence in your life. A congruent life is a thriving life.

To understand the power of congruence, consider acorns. An acorn is born with all the intelligence necessary to become an oak; it already has the DNA of a full-grown tree. Social pressures may will it to be a pine tree, but no amount of pressure will change the destiny of the acorn to be an oak. Soil and weather impact the acorn's ability to develop the deep roots required for it to bloom and thrive where planted. Trees with deep roots are stable, resilient, and empowered to bring their unique foliage and fruits into the world. When we work and play in environments that promote congruence (authenticity), our passions grow. When our passions outgrow our fears, we experience courage. Courage is what it takes to act congruently, aligning with our reality with our unique desires and values. Congruence, between who we believe we are and who we believe we ought to be, allows us to thrive.

We need self-compassion to develop congruence between our ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ selves. In turn, self-compassion develops through the practice of unconditional positive regard. Carl Jung first popularized the term “unconditional positive regard.” It means that we accept others, respecting their right to make decisions and trusting that even if we do not agree or understand their actions, they are doing their best with the resources (including their degree of congruence and sense of coherence) that they have.

Unconditional Positive Regard in Relationships
When we are in a relationship with another in which we believe we are unconditionally and positively regarded, it promotes a greater ability for us to mirror this same unconditional positive regard for ourselves. Essentially, receiving this form of unconditional acceptance from others demonstrates that we are good enough and worthy of love, no matter what; as a result, we cultivate and mirror this same love and acceptance inwardly (self-compassion). However, having someone in our life who shows us unconditional positive regard is not enough, we must actually believe or accept their regard. And how can we believe that other people will care for us, not matter what, without testing that belief? Remember the “bag” from Part II? Testing that regard means bringing our qualities back out of the bag, retrieving the parts of ourselves that are authentic but may feel forbidden. If we only play the role we are prescribed role, and do not behave in a way that would risk the approval of others, we will not come to know that we are unconditionally accepted in our most treasured relationships. Many people fear that being authentic, bringing those banished parts into the light, will lead to rejection. However, until we retrieve those repressed parts of ourselves from the shadows, testing our relationships as we do so, we will not believe we are unconditionally and positively regarded for our ‘real’ selves. A relationship of unconditional positive regard turned inward is self-compassion, which when mirrored to us by others, will naturally develop.

For many fortunate people, their first experience of a relationship with unconditional positive regard is with a parent. Congruence is a natural outcome of a childhood characterized by feeling unconditionally and positively regarded by a respected other. However, this is not always the case. In my research, I have found that people also find a refuge of acceptance among friends, extended family, and sometimes clergy. It is possible, but rare, to learn self-compassion without also feeling that someone accepts you, unconditionally, just the way you are. Providing unconditional positive regard to co-workers may be one of the most powerful things we can do to help enable our fellow caregivers to thrive. Our ability to serve others in this way hinges on our own capacity for self-compassion. In this way, the unconditionally positive regard we experience in relationships and cultivate for ourselves reinforce one another.
Requirements, Qualities, and Facilitators of Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)

Requirements of UPR:
• a perception that we are accepted as we are, quirks and wounds included,
• an ability to see our and others inherent human worth, separate from behaviors and achievements.
• setting boundaries out of kindness to ourselves and others; communicating our expectations and values, which prevents hostility/resentment.

Qualities of UPR:
• a felt safety to let our hair down with room for mistakes without a looming threat of rejection,
• we celebrate diversity knowing the benefits far outweigh the discomforts,
• a willingness to respectfully work through differences, agreeing to disagree, normalizing conflict is a healthy component of authentic relationships,
• we focus on progress not perfection,
• vulnerability is a welcome and essential part of connecting and empowering ourselves and others.

Facilitators of UPR:
• a spiritual connection to self/higher power that provides us with UPR,
• doing our best and letting that be enough with room to learn and grow from mistakes and trusting that others are also doing their best with the tools/resources they have,
• investigating our assumptions running assumptions. For example, just because it may have been true in a past situation, is it really true in this situation?
• honoring our word to cultivate self-trust/self-integrity,
• cultivating non-attachment amid conflict – recognizing that our own and other’s projections color the current experience to the point where many times, the emotional charge has little to do with the current event and a lot to do with a past experience/belief system; therefore, it’s not personal!

The Power of Self-Compassion
You can think of self-compassion as looking at yourself with gentle acceptance. Self-compassion enables us to connect to our inner world. Self-compassion has two main requirements: objectivity and willingness. When we are both objective and willing, we can accept unconditionally whatever thoughts and emotions may arise, welcome them, and digest them. Digesting is a process of acknowledging the dissonance of difficult feelings as they arise; validating our own suffering, then stepping back and investigating their source. When we acknowledge our inner dissonance (resulting from an incongruity), we gain awareness of the forbidden parts of ourselves, those parts were previously put into the shadow so that we could express a more acceptable (ideal) version of ourselves. Awareness enables us to re-integrate these previously rejected pieces of ourselves. Digesting and integrating all parts of ourselves, even those less culturally favorable parts, is the path toward congruence, cleaning and clearing as we move further into the light toward wholeness.

When we are more self-compassion, we are also more congruent, and as a result less likely to get blown about in bad weather. As a result, congruent and self-compassionate individuals have higher stress thresholds and less chronic mental and physical conditions. Because congruent people carry less shame, they rarely project shame/hostility onto others.

Self-compassion is unconditional positive regard turned inward. Because it enables us to accept all parts ourselves, it acts as an antidote to the shame.

Self-compassion teaches us that our passing thoughts and actions do not define us. Self-compassion shows us that we need not be perfect to be enough, worthy of love, and accepted by others. Self-
Compassion is gained in childhoods that enable them to internalize unconditional positive regard from someone they look up to. If not acquired in childhood, one must re-program themselves as an adult to acquire it by establishing relationships of unconditional positive regard with others. Neff (2018), a seminal researcher on the concept of self-compassion, identified three main components of self-compassion:

1. **Showing self-kindness** - Talking to yourself the way you would to a good friend;
2. **Common Humanity** - Reminding yourself that everyone fails and suffers from time to time;
3. **Mindfulness** - Observing any negative feelings you're experiencing rather than suppressing them.

One’s level of congruence and their ability to practice self-compassion impacts how they interpret stimuli in the workplace. Those who lack self-compassion are prone to incongruence, when the ‘real’ self is far apart from the ‘ideal’ self. Incongruence carries feelings of shame, and as a result stimulus is more likely seen as a threat/stressor. Those who are more self-compassionate, enabling a sense of congruence, are likely to view stimuli as manageable challenges rather than stressors (Dames, 2018). This objectivity then promotes a greater capacity to resolve or at least manage feelings of dissonance, which improves the ability to engage in thriving.

Those that practice self-compassion are less prone to a variety of mental health conditions fueled by anxiety and depression; they can mitigate stressors, they are happier, more satisfied with life, more self-confident, and have better health outcomes (Bluth, Campo, Futch, & Gaylord, 2017; Dames, 2018; Gunnell, et al., 2017; Homan & Sirois, 2017; Hwang, Kim, Yang, & Yang, 2016; Kelly, Vimalakanthan, & Miller, 2014; Neff & Germer, 2018).

Caregivers suffering from burnout also tend to be deficient in self-compassion (Montero-Marín, Zubia, Cereceda, Piva Demarzo, Trénc, & García-Campayo, 2016). For example, those with higher levels of self-compassion are more likely to manage workplace stressors with confidence, as opposed to feeling overwhelmed by a perceived personal inadequacy in addition to the initial stressor. Self-compassion interrupts rumination on our feelings of inadequacy, saving us from the emotional exhaustion and self-destructive thoughts that might otherwise result.

Self-compassion enables us to accept all parts of ourselves, without condition, letting any judgments fall into the background. This in turn helps us digest and even celebrate all parts of our personality. This acceptance promotes congruence and prevents us from carrying shame (for not being an ‘ideal’ that we feel we should be). Those who habitually practice compassion for self will then naturally provide compassion for others. Our treatment of others follows how we treat ourselves. Self-compassionate employees enable communities of practice to flourish. It almost goes without saying that, when teams lack self-compassion, incongruence fuels perfectionism and hostile relations between co-workers (Dames, 2018). Father Greg Boyle, founder of a well-known gang intervention and rehabilitation program in the United States, asserts that “the answer to every question is compassion” (2018). I would add that the answer to every question is self-compassion, from there, compassion for others is born. Establishing high levels of self-compassion has four core requirements:

1. **Working to establish relationships where we feel unconditionally and positively regarded** for our ‘real’ selves is a core requirement of believing we too can provide such a thing for ourselves.
2. Establishing an ability to provide unconditional positive regard for self naturally occurs for those who had it mirrored to them as children. For the rest of us, we develop it through loving-kindness practices, which evolve into an ability to provide unconditional positive regard for oneself and others.
3. Using the stress management practices, as described below, we can open up space between ourselves and our experience of suffering; this is non-attachment, which enables a moment of pause before we grasp onto, push away, or identify with a thought and action. This space is
imperative to establish a sense of safety within ourselves, where we can accept ourselves without condition.

4. Self-compassion challenges and transmutes the inner judgments that once ruled our inner space. When our inner space is clear, we develop a willingness to look inside for self-soothing. Painful emotions can cause us to avoid dropping into the inner space, especially for those who tend toward incongruence. However, it is necessary to digest and resolve our dissonance, which promotes congruence.

*If emotions are too painful/stressful, causing one to use substances to distract or numb, sinking into self is not realistic. We must first manage the biological response, lowering cortisol levels.*

### Brain Chunking: Helpful or Harmful?

We are constantly bombarded with sensory and social information, and in any given moment are making dozens of subconscious decisions and judgements. Such rapid unconscious processing of information is necessary to function in life, however, sometimes the result of these processes (brain chunking) is snap judgements that can be inaccurate, over simplistic, and potentially harmful. Self-compassion requires more consciousness and a slower pace than this default rapid unconscious thinking. We need to make the effort to transition to our conscious, sensing mode, stepping back in order to tap into self and other-compassion (adding a sense of heartful connection to our perspective).

George Miller, a seminal author in cognitive psychology, coined ‘Brain Chunking’ in 1956. The term describes our subconscious tendency to organize stimuli/information into patterns that represent a meaningful whole (Neath & Surprenant, 2003). Brain chunking develops our intuition and forms our assumptions. As humans, we are constantly trying to identify patterns within what often feels like chaos, promoting a sense of control and order; this is a normal part of our humanity. There is a danger to this patterning and ordering, a danger of putting ourselves or others in overly simplified and controlled boxes that are inaccurate or that limit one’s ability to move out of that box. For example, a medical diagnosis can be helpful if it educates and inspires us to receive a necessary treatment to resolve or manage our ailment. However, brain chunking can dis-empower us and others if we inaccurately label or box ourselves or others in, hampering the ability to evolve beyond the box we feel limited by. The difference between reacting, emerging from sub-conscious pre-judgments/assumptions, and acting is mindfulness (conscious investigation).

Our subconscious pre-judges (brain chunks) to make sense of our world, which promotes intelligence and intuitive capacities imperative to make every day critical decisions. As with racism, when we assume pre-judgements, as in before they are mindfully investigated, are facts they may evolve into fixed and often harmful prejudices. For instance, consider your assumptions around gender and ethnicity. These assumptions form over time, patterned pieces of information we lump together to form beliefs about a certain group or type of person. These assumptions can be helpful to efficiently and intuitively make decisions and to help us navigate typical cultural preferences or to foresee events that are likely to occur amid a mix certain types of people, events, and contexts.

Brain chunking helps us create a sense of order out of what could otherwise feel chaotic, making sense of our world (improving our sense of coherence). Regarding caregiving, making rapid decisions in critical situations is what separates the novice from the expert. Through experience we hone our intuitive capacities, enabling us to make quick decisions in critical situations. However, if our pre-judgements go unchecked, lacking curiosity and conscious investigation, they can do immeasurable harm. To avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations, it is helpful to step back, slow down, and remember to cultivate a sense of curiosity about the situation (what is different here?) and to hold our assumptions lightly; be open to surprise.
**Emotional Management at Work**

Emotional management is a form of literacy (Matthews, 2006) that is largely subconscious and dependant on our coping habits, which correlate with our degree of emotional development beginning in childhood. How we perceive the outer world, whether it feels threatening versus manageable, impacts us personally and professionally.

Relating to places of work, 90% of workplace success correlates with a person’s ability to navigate their emotions and their awareness of the emotions of others (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). It requires us to mindfully hold our emotions, reflecting on what we are feeling and to resolve areas of dissonance (Russ, 1998). As for work impacts, those with more emotional management skills will typically have lower rates of absenteeism, healthier coping choices, better psychological health, and perform at higher levels (Sardo, 2004). Developing emotional management skills in an accepting, empathetic, and supportive environment may assist, even protect, those who are most vulnerable to the stressful nature of their work environment. Developing emotional management skills as an adult requires a conscious effort to interrupt old through patterns and subconscious tendencies, which occurs via strategic mindfulness practices.

**Mindful Super Powers: The Necessity of Curiosity and Self-Compassion**

Being mindful begins with cultivating a sense of curiosity about the present moment. This curiosity enables us to immerse, staving off boredom and the incessant dependence on rapidly changing external stimulation. Staying with a mindfulness practice requires that we also practice self-compassion, as without this unconditional positive regard, we are prone to get frustrated, often spiralling into self-destructive thoughts, causing our mindfulness practice to feel more like self-punishment than self-care. Through curiosity, we gain the interest and resulting motivation to continue exploring the intricacies of the inner and outer world. Through self-compassion, we attain the grace and patience to celebrate progress, despite our imperfections and as a result, we begin to trust the process. Part V dives into cultivating curiosity, accepting what is via unconditional positive regard for self (self-compassion), enabling us to sustain a heartful practice and to develop our emotional management capacities in the process.

**Attuning Practice: Relating to Self-Compassion**

By reflecting on personal experiences, there is an opportunity to develop awareness and acceptance of our unique belief systems, values, and resources and/or barriers that may impact our ability to thrive. Self-awareness is a component of mindfulness and requires us to stop trying to ‘figure things out’ and to surrender to the inner voice; this takes heart-fullness and vulnerability.

Think about the term self-compassion…what has it meant to you in the past?

How has your perception of it changed?

When you consider unconditional positive regard, how often do you apply it inwardly? Consider the last time you made a mistake or said something you regret; how did you treat yourself?

TIP: often we don’t recognize negative self-talk, but rather we feel shame and we often habitually sit in that shame, which is just as destructive as negative self-talk.

Looking forward, connecting to your desire (what you actually want, not what you ‘should’ want), what changes would you like to make?
What obstacle(s) do you foresee in attaining the change?

What quality is required to overcome the obstacle?

This is where we set an intention! Setting goals/intentions is how we choose a place to plant our seeds of change and a way in which we prepare the soil to provide the most nurturing environment for successful growth. What do you need to do to develop the characteristic required to get what you want?

TIP: this is not a ‘figure it out’ exercise; rather, it requires deep inner wisdom that can only be accessed through the inner space. If new for you, try it out, use the practices below to ‘drop in’ and be open to whatever unfolds. Learning to trust the process requires a willingness to live with questions. Trusting that the answers will appear if and when we need them, at just the right time and in just the right way. All it requires from you is to take notice. Taking notice builds inner trust, a key requirement to learn and to develop our inner compass.

**Attuning Practice: Self-Kindness Assessment**

This self-kindness assessment was adapted from Saakvitne and Pearlman’s (1996) self-care worksheet. The following worksheet for assessing self-kindness is not exhaustive nor prescriptive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-kindness/self-care that are relevant for you and to consider how often and how well you are taking care of yourself in a typical day. When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list that make you think, “I would never do that”? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-kindness and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = I barely or rarely do this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 = I never do this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? = This never occurred to me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Physical Self-Kindness**

- Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- Eat healthily
- Exercise
- Get regular medical care for prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when sick
- Get massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
- Take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes I like
- Take vacations
- Other:

**Psychological Self-Care**

- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet
- Make time for self-reflection
- Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
| Have my own personal psychotherapy |
| Write in a journal |
| Read literature that is unrelated to work |
| Do something at which I am not expert or in charge |
| Attend to minimizing stress in my life |
| Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre |
| Be curious |
| Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes |
| Other: |

**Emotional Self-Care**

- Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in my life
- Give myself affirmations, praise myself
- Love myself
- Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- Allow myself to cry
- Find things that make me laugh
- Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests

**Spiritual Self-Care**

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish my optimism and hope
- Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Be open to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- Meditate
- Pray
- Sing
- Have experiences of awe
- Contribute to causes in which I believe
- Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music

**Relationship Self-Kindness**

- Schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- Schedule regular activities with my children
- Make time to see friends
- Call, check on, or see my relatives
- Spend time with my companion animals
- Stay in contact with faraway friends
- Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
- Allow others to do things for me
- Enlarge my social circle
- Ask for help when I need it
- Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust

**Workplace or Professional Self-Kindness**

- Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
Take time to chat with co-workers
Make quiet time to complete tasks
Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
Set limits with clients and colleagues
Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”
Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
Get regular supervision or consultation
Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
Have a peer support group
(If relevant) Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest

Overall Balance
Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

Strengthening Practice: Body Scan

“Mindfulness opens a door of awareness to who we are and character strengths are what is behind the door since character strengths are who we are at core” (Niemiec, 2014).

Sensations are different from the thoughts and emotions that may trigger them. When we focus on the sensations that move in the body, we train our brains to be present, to practice non-attachment/non-judgment, and to connect to the inner world. You will likely label sensations you feel as good or bad, which often elicits an emotion. Notice the label and then letting it go, stepping back from it and returning to the impartial observer role. As an additional option, if certain body parts seem tense or trigger judgmental thoughts, practice breathing loving-kindness into those areas, softening the area more with each expiration. If focusing on a body part brings pleasure, practice gratitude, capturing and expanding a sense of appreciation and connection with the body.

While it may take effort in the beginning, use the opportunity to practice loving-kindness by releasing the need to do practices perfectly. Focus on the principle, which is to be present with the sensations of the body, letting go of the details of how you get there. For the first few times, read the script below before you practice, each time you may notice something different and tweak your practice. Trust it will unfold just as it should.

The exercise begins with an attention to breath and moves into a full body scan. Lie down (or sit in a comfortable position) in a quiet place. Close your eyes. Release your shoulders, dropping them down and away from your ears. Focus on breathing (mindfulness), observing the natural and involuntary process of breathing, without trying to control it; this enables space/non-attachment and it takes practice! As you relax, you may feel sleepy, and you may find that being relaxed often sends you into a daydream, this is normal, especially in the beginning! Each time it happens, bring your focus back to the exercise; this practice of bringing the focus back IS the training. Bring your attention back to the breath, in ….and out… observing how it feels as it moves in and out of the body, as it transitions between the inhale and the exhale.
If frustration arises, let it come, be present with it, talk kindly to it, remembering that emotions do not define us, rather they are guests in our home, coming and going as they need to. If negative self-talk or sensations arise, practice loving-kindness, remembering that everyone struggles (shared humanity) in the beginning and that struggle is part of the process. Every struggle is a growth opportunity.

Continue to bring your attention back to the breath, allowing each breath to come as it may, with no conscious effort to control it. Throughout the exercise, keep bringing yourself back to the observer role, noticing (not controlling) sensations that come and go. Perhaps you notice a lack of sensation, practice letting go of expectation. Cultivate a sense of curiosity about any sensations as they come and go, shift their location, texture, and form. Play with descriptive words that reflect how they feel, look, and move. For example, are they dull or sharp? Light or heavy? Do they feel soft? Are they moving quickly or do they have a slow flowing movement? Be open to whatever the experience brings. Your mind will often wander, especially in the beginning. When you notice your mind has wandered, recognize it, practice loving-kindness, and return your attention to the body scan.

Now we begin the body scan, bringing awareness to the contact points between the body and the floor (or chair). With each breath, relax a little more. Imagine yourself melting into the surface below you. Turn your focus to a scan of your body. Scanning the sensations of your body is done in a variety of ways, but the idea is to bring your attention to each part of your body. You might start by taking a deep breath, imagining the breath as it travels from your nostrils to your lungs and all the way down to your toes gathering tension as it sweeps through your body and releasing the tension as you exhale. Throughout the exercise, as tensions or discomforts arise, practice letting go of judgement, accepting the sensations as they are. If too uncomfortable to continue, bring your breath to that area, softening it until it can fade into the background. Now turn your attention to your toes, perhaps wiggling them, feeling the sensations against your socks, shoes, the floor, or the air as they move back and forth. Then move the attention across your toes and up your foot to your ankle, your lower calf, and up your thigh, moving up to your stomach, feeling the breath move in and out, rising and falling. Bring your attention to your heart space, perhaps even noticing how it slows as you continue to relax into the breath; turn your attention to your right hand, moving up the arm; bring your attention to your chest, scanning up your neck to your face. Feel the sensations in your jaw and your throat; notice the feeling of the back of your head making contact with the surface beneath it, moving up to the top of your head. Now, notice how your body parts are connected, taking notice of any sensations, welcoming them as guests and with curiosity. Watch how the sensations shift and change. Practices accepting all sensations as equally welcome guests in your home, neither good nor bad, just sensations rising and falling, shifting and changing. Turn your focus back to your breath, observing it for as long as you like. When ready, open your eyes. Take a few minutes to reflect on this practice, how did you feel during it? What parts of the body seemed tense? Where some easier to sense and attend to than others? Practice allowing/accepting every experience you had, observing judgments (labeling as good or bad) that flows in and allowing it to just as easily to flow out. You can use this tool in an abbreviated version by finding a few moments in the day to drop in and bring your attention to the body. You don’t need to be lying down. You could do this practice while you’re standing in line at the grocery store or while you are walking from one place to another. Practice moving from your toes on up, doing a scan for tension and breathing into those specific areas.

Clearing Practice: Dealing with bodily tension – Softening into Sanctuary
As sensations, thoughts, and emotions change, coming, and going like waves in the ocean, try to notice when they transition. Observe how every sensation ebbs and flows. As you notice the subtleties in the
sensations in your inner world, you learn to distinguish the passing events from your essence. Connecting and grounding to essence (higher power/higher self) promotes an ability to view passing events with a degree of non-attachment, knowing that stimuli in the external world do not define who you are.

If we avoid emotions when they present, we are prone to get trapped in the superficial sense of discomfort, missing the opportunity to acknowledge and feel into the deeper wound. If our deeper wounds remain buried, they will continue to manifest as mental and physical illnesses, not to harm us but to alert us to an opportunity for healing. Only when we allow ourselves to feel our wounds can we release them. As we release them, we gain a greater capacity to connect inwardly and outwardly.

**Moving through discomfort by accepting and softening.** Healing occurs in layers. The initial feeling is often the tip of the iceberg. Denying the existence of an uncomfortable emotion prevents us from healing the larger wound beneath it. Removing a layer often uncovers another layer to heal. Though old trauma can feel intense, even overwhelming, we can trust that our higher power (or higher self) will not give us more than we are ready to handle. Trust your intuition. Notice and investigate the emotional messages that present. When overwhelmed, stop, take a break, practice soothing yourself; doing so is a way to develop self-compassion. Rushing the process can be a form of self-punishment, leading to emotional dissociation and further incongruence. Take it slow, stay connected, making peace with all parts of the work while you gain trust that your higher power (or higher self) is holding you, providing you with the strength and resources you need to take the next step in your journey. Every self-compassionate and connected step moves you toward congruence with your 'real' self. Trust the process, trust the pace, accept that there are no shortcuts in this work. *Choose to prioritize the means of getting there over your end goal.*

Each layer we remove is a step forward on our healing (congruence) journey. Healing, moving toward wholeness/congruence, involves recapturing pieces of ourselves that we left in the shadows and letting go of old baggage/trauma. Each difficult meditation/mindful session is an investment in this healing journey. An equally important part of this process is grace. Grace for the days we avoid the discomfort brewing in our inner world, trusting that we will be called back to it when we are ready. **Getting too deep too fast, ignoring inner cues to take a break, can further compound and reinforce trauma.** We need to trust the messages we receive from our bodies. They are gifts, guiding us on our healing journey. While they may feel threatening if we attach or over identify with them, their role is to show us, to alert us of areas of incongruence so that we can tend to them. Like a sliver produces pain so that we can remove it, so emotions provide cues so that we can work through new or old (trauma) dissonance. Cultivating self-compassion by stepping back (non-attachment) and talking to our pain much like we would a child or a friend enables us to take a break when that is in our highest interest. *The pain you feel is an ally, listen to the message it carries.*

When you notice tension, bring breath to it, softening the discomfort associated with the emotion or tightness. Bring yourself back to the role of the observer, watching how the tension ebb's in and then flows out. Each time you notice yourself resisting it, breathe into the resistance, soften it, welcome it, letting it rise and fall. If the tension/pain is too intense, it may result from old trauma coming up for healing.; this is a good thing! Step back from the sensation (non-attachment), knowing it does not define you, it is not a threat, rather, a passing guest in your house, worthy of attention, love, and compassion. Speak to the discomfort, perhaps saying things that seem natural to you like, “I am with you, I love you, I’m so sorry for your suffering, etc.” Rather than resisting it, cultivate curiosity by observing how it moves, how it feels, what shape it is, is it sharp or dull, does it come in waves, etc. Observing in this way helps us step back
from the discomfort, enabling us to transform judgment (good or bad) into curiosity and an ability to accept things as they are. This acceptance is part of unconditional positive regard for self, enabling what is to come and go, to be digested, and in time, to heal. If sensations are too intense, refer to cortisol lowering tools (described in Part IV) such as 4-7-8 breathing or fire breathing, working to manage the biological response to feelings of threat. Managing the biological response enables a degree of non-attachment from the emotion, providing enough objectivity to mitigate feelings of threat.

**Attuning Practice: A Meeting with your ‘Real’ Self**

“Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am” Palmer (2007).

For many, surrendering to the inner world will feel foreign and ambiguous, eliciting feelings of fear and anxiety. When these feelings arise, remind yourself that it will pass. With repetition, as you develop comfort in this new space, the ambiguity and fear dissipate as we learn to connect to the peace and stillness within. These growing pains are a doorway, where we take a risk. Drop down into the unknown, trusting that we will be held in the process.

**Courage is not a lack of fear, rather the ability to feel our fear and act anyways when it is the best thing for us and others.**

Referring back to Robert Bly’s ‘Long Bag’ he describes how incongruences develop, often in childhood, and then on into our adult years. He describes how throughout our lives, we put every undesirable part of ourselves into a “bag”. For our own healing, however, we need to recover, and be present with, those parts of ourselves that we have suppressed.

When we were one or two years old we had what we might visualize as a 360-degree personality. Energy radiated out from all parts of our body and all parts of our psyche. A child running is a living globe of energy. We had a ball of energy, all right; but one day we noticed that our parents didn’t like certain parts of that ball. They said things like: “Can’t you be still?” Or “It isn’t nice to try and kill your brother.” Behind us we have an invisible bag, and the part of us our parents don’t like, we, to keep our parents’ love, put in the bag. By the time we go to school our bag is quite large. Then our teachers have their say: “Good children don’t get angry over such little things.” So we take our anger and put it in the bag.” … Our bags were already a mile long. Then we do a lot of bag-stuffing in high school. This time it’s no longer the evil grownups that pressure us, but people our own age… Different cultures fill the bag with different contents. We spend our life until we’re twenty deciding what parts of ourself to put into the bag, and we spend the rest of our lives trying to get them out again. (Bly, 1989)

Bring your attention to the 360-degree personality (Jung, 1954), which is 100% congruent with the authentic self, compared to those who are largely divided between the ‘real’ and a prescribed ‘ideal’ and as a result, more incongruent (Rogers, 1959). We often fall prey to a mistaken identity, where we assimilate to our surrounding culture, and the prescribed expectations of those close to us. We mistakenly believe we are mere humans, having an occasional spiritual experience, as opposed to spiritual beings having a human experience. When we peel back the expectations that weigh on us, created by our habits, the habits of others, and the homogenizing culture we incubate in, we awaken to our ‘real’ selves, our ‘real’ purpose for being here. When we live into and out of our authentic selves, we find that everything we need to for
fulfillment is within us. All of our needs and the resources necessary to fulfill those needs emerge and we enter a natural flow. Take time to remember what is ‘real’: 

1. Drop into your inner self by focusing on the inhalation of your breath. Meet you. Observe him/her growing up, unencumbered by the pressure to conform to the standards and expectations of others. Rooted in a deep sense that all parts of self are worthy of love and celebration. What do ‘you’ look and act like as a whole person, expressing oneself 100% authentically? Imagine, every piece of you, the strengths and shortcomings, the highs and lows; every part is loved accepted as part of the package. There is no bar to reach, no role to fulfill, no condition to meet. You are free to be you. That is enough; that is more than enough.

2. Now, imagining you are this person, where all parts of yourself are in the light, nothing banished to the shadows. What do you love to do with your free time? What activities do you get lost in? What makes time fly by when you are doing it? What makes you feel alive and connected to yourself and maybe others too?

3. Now, visualize your entry into adulthood, spreading your wings as you gain independence, what dreams do you have? Unencumbered by practicalities and expectations, what career entices you?

4. Now, visualize you as a more established adult, what activities are you drawn to? What desires do you have? What is fun? Be cautious here, this is not about what others may pull you into, or what you think you should like, or what your culture might label as a fun, rewarding, or a cool hobby. This is unique to you, that thing you may spend hours doing and yet it feels like time flies by. You finish more energized than you started.

5. Think about the social circle your true-self would choose, where no conditions of worth are attached to popularity or to one’s ability to attract a certain quantity or quality of friends and intimate partners. What does it feel like to be unencumbered by a felt need to ascribe to the ideal relationships and social life that many feel the need to attain to feel approved of? Where having one, none, or many friends or intimate partners is all valued with no condition of worth attached. What would YOUR ideal relationships look like?

6. Connect to a sense of desire. This desire is yours. This desire is a connection point to your ‘real’ self. It is not the desires of others. It is not how you have felt that others want you to walk, talk, and appear like. Your desires pull at your heart, they ignite your passion, they energize you and make you feel alive. They are your unique doorway to thriving. Re-learning about those desires requires us to drop into the inner space, heart-fully connecting to the essence of who we are. Free of the ‘ideals’ we serve and the masks we hide behind.

**Strategies to Remember our Essence**
Finding our essence can be difficult as it is often cloaked by years of conditioning. If you are struggling to identify what is ‘real,’ consider:

1. Whom you most admire. Often, the qualities in others we most admire are a projection of our own qualities that have not yet emerged from the shadows.

2. Find a picture of yourself as a young child (ideally before school), reflect on what it was like at that age, can you remember what drew you in, what captured your heart? Perhaps it is certain people, tasks, events, or activities that you remember getting lost in. If you can’t recall any memories that young, can you think back to times as an older child where you were immersed in an activity/event/relationship? Consider what drew you, what called you in those activities? What was unique about them? What made them special?
3. Contact someone who knew you before you assimilated to societal/cultural ideals (before school age if possible). Ask them what they recalled about you, what stood out to them? What did you like/drawn to? What did you dislike/resistant to?

Best-selling author Cherie Carter-Scott (1998) came up with ten rules for life that remind us how the ‘real’ often gets obscured by the ‘ideal.’

1. **YOU WILL RECEIVE A BODY**
   You may like it or hate it, but it will be yours for the entire period this time around.

2. **YOU WILL LEARN LESSONS**
   You are enrolled in a full-time informal school called life. Each day in this school you will have the opportunity to learn lessons. You may not like the lessons or think them irrelevant and stupid.

3. **THERE ARE NO MISTAKES, ONLY LESSONS**
   Growth is a process of trial and error: Experimentation. The “failed” experiments are as much a part of the process as the experiment that ultimately works.

4. **A LESSON IS REPEATED UNTIL LEARNED**
   A lesson will be presented to you in various forms until you have learned it. When you have learned it, you can go on to the next lesson.

5. **LEARNING LESSONS DOES NOT END**
   There is no part of life that does not contain its lessons. If you are alive, there are lessons to be learned.

6. **“THERE” IS NO BETTER THAN “HERE”**
   When your “there” has become a “here,” you will simply obtain another “there” that will, again, look better than “here”.

7. **OTHERS ARE MERELY MIRRORS OF YOU**
   You cannot love or hate something about another person unless it reflects to you something you love or hate about yourself.

8. **WHAT YOU MAKE OF YOUR LIFE IS UP TO YOU**
   You have all the tools and resources you need. What you do with them is up to you. The choice is yours.

9. **YOUR ANSWERS LIE INSIDE OF YOU**
   The answers to life’s questions lie inside you. All you need to do is look, listen, and trust.

10. **YOU WILL FORGET ALL THIS.**

**Strengthening Practice: What do you ‘Really’ Desire?**

“Self-care is never a selfish act - it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch” (Palmer, 2000).

Now that you have reflected on your essence, think of one activity that excites you; something that resonates with your inner child (the days when we primary acted from our essence, easily engaging in play). Perhaps you even remember getting lost in a similar activity as a child.

What are the obstacles to making these activities a part of your life?

What actions are necessary to navigate the obstacles?
When will these actions be taken?

**The Journey Ahead**

Part III was about coming to know congruence and self-compassion, attuning and applying the concepts to our inner world. Developing congruence and self-compassion cultivates a safe inner space, one in which we can find comfort and reprieve. As you drop into the inner world, it is likely that you will find unresolved trauma there, as this is a normal consequence of living incongruently. Know that you are not alone, this is part of learning to be human, remembering and resolving what has come before in order to make way for a new way going forward.

Part IV will provide some tools to help you with the weather, including both the external stimuli and the internal stimuli that you are now seeing in a fresh way (re-orientation as a component of developing sense of coherence). Continue to lean in and trust the process, enabling your inner wisdom to guide you and re-orient you on a new trajectory. You will continue on this journey of **coming to know** your needs, the impetus of stress (a threat to your needs) and the core assets that enable you to thrive (congruence and SOC). You will continue absorb the knowing deeper by **attuning** (applying to self), **strengthening** (accessing inner resources), **clearing** (working through trauma), and **aligning** (calling and vision). The process will call you forward, moving you from habitually trying to figure it out to align with your senses, building intuition and heartful knowing.
Part IV: Navigating Stressors: Managing the Weather

Dropping into our roots enables us to stay grounded, despite the swirling chaos of weather raging around us. If we cannot ground ourselves when the weather feels threatening, we fixate on what we cannot control. When we fixate on what we cannot control, we lose sight of what we can control.

The experience of acute stress prevents us from being willing to be present with our emotions. When we can’t be present with our emotions, we also can’t resolve the incongruence that simmers beneath them. In my experience, being present with emotion can be like allowing the vinegar and baking powder to mix: the chemicals react, and the mixture bubbles up and out of us, leaving us in a more neutral, less volatile steady state. When the debris has cleared, we can better see ourselves and understand where our ideal and real self are dangerously distant. If we fail to address our emotions, we may turn to substances or potentially harmful activities to distract us from our suffering. With practice, we can become less threatened by intense emotions, knowing they need processing as part of our journey toward wholeness. Trauma can be a particularly challenging source of incongruence, because trauma creates the feeling that the threats we once experienced are still looming over us. Processing the pieces of ourselves that are raw and fractured enables what I call “clearing practice.” Clearing practice both enables and requires a greater willingness to drop into our inner world. When we are clear, it becomes much easier to align our actions with our authentic values and desires for ourselves. We are less vulnerable to self-sabotage, and more able to thrive.

The feelings and traumas you have stuffed deep inside you are still there, waiting for you to be still, witness, and release them.

Dropping into our inner world is sometimes easier said than done. When we feel trapped in cyclical thought patterns of self-judgment, criticism, and self-destructive thoughts, the inner world feels threatening. Heightened cortisol levels support the fight-flight-freeze response, reinforcing the feeling that our inner space is chaotic and unsafe. Substances and some impulsive behaviors provide external “solutions” to this internal problem. It is possible, however, to hit the reset button for our sense of our inner work. Taking a step back, interrupting thought rumination, creates a space that promotes an ability to objectively re-orient ourselves. Taking the time for quiet introspection counteracts the effects of cortisol by activating the opposing parasympathetic system, which enables the body to relax. By activating the bodies parasympathetic system, we are more likely to objectively manage our thoughts, which improves our ability/willingness to self-soothe by dropping into the inner world.

Being intentional about engaging our sympathetic/parasympathetic system activation is closely related to the key concepts of coherence and congruence throughout this book. A fundamental difference between some people thrive while others in similar circumstances suffer is threat perception. Those who thrive are more likely to see new stimuli as manageable, where others might see danger. When we perceive stimuli in our lives as manageable, we are better positioned to navigate challenges without undue stress. We see stimuli as manageable when we do not believe they will threat we:

- Feel congruent, unconditionally accepted for our ‘real’ selves, believe that we are “good enough”, and see ourselves as worthwhile and valuable
- Have a high sense of coherence, believe we have the resources necessary to manage most challenges, that things will work out in a reasonable fashion, and that our efforts have meaning.
Recognizing the Fight-Flight-Freeze Response

The sympathetic nervous system triggers the fight-flight-freeze response, sending us into a subjective spiral, even when it would often work out better for us to stay objective, calm, and collected. Every person has a tendency to either fight, flight, or freeze when this response is activates, favouring one of the defense mechanisms over the others. For instance, those who tend to take on a fighting posture often slip into critical and self-destructive thought programs (“I’m such a loser, I’m unlovable, I’ll never get this right”). Here, the enemy we are choosing to fight is ourselves; in this case, the antidote to the fight response is self-kindness. Those who flee will typically avoid the discomfort by turning to outside distractions as a numbing agent or using substances, adrenalin, or busy activities to dissociate. The antidote to avoiding or fleeing from the threat is recognizing shared suffering within our humanity; replacing isolating behaviors with belonging and connectedness with others (Neff, 2018). Those who freeze are prone to cyclical thought rumination (“I shouldn’t have said that…If I would have just…”). The antidote to the freeze response, causing us to ruminate on what we could have and should have done, is mindfulness. Mindfulness interrupts the cyclical thinking by bringing our attention to the present moment through our senses.

Besides recognizing our own defensive tendencies, it is helpful to recognize the tendencies of our loved ones and colleagues. When we can recognize defensive patterns, we are more likely to interrupt and diffuse the process. For instance, observing the reactions that occur when a colleague who avoids or flees from conflict has an emotional run in with another colleague who takes on a fighting posture when triggered, or the reaction that occurs when two colleagues who tend toward fighting amid a conflict.

Stress Busters

“\textit{A Memory without the emotional charge is called wisdom}” (Dispenza, 2012).

Knowing your defensive tendency can help you recognize when it is happening, providing a cue to step back and to engage in what I call a \textbf{stress buster}. Stress busters work to interrupt the fight or flight response by triggering the parasympathetic system, which reduces perceptions of threat and calms the body. When we practice stress mitigation rituals, we return to feeling safe and secure. For illustration, I’m going to briefly describe three ways to build a stress busting ritual to interrupt the stress response and activate the parasympathetic system. These rituals are commonly taught in therapeutic settings and I’ve found them to be quite effective. The first promotes connection, this generates optimism and gratitude, enabling reorientation, and the third promotes loving-kindness and non-attachment.

First is to use comforting touch. Gentle and welcome holding of hands, or a hand on the shoulder, can be very effective. When there is no one around to practice comforting touch, self-hugs will do! Intentional placement of the hand on your body can be very effective. Try placing a hand on your belly and feeling your breath rise and fall or resting a palm on your forehead. Try taking a breath with your hand placed over your heart and see how a small ritual can bring a sense of calm. For me, placing a hand on my heart helps me focus on breathing through the heart space and provides a sense of protection when I’m feeling vulnerable.

Second is to allow ourselves a subtle smile, or an inner smile, while we are sitting with difficult emotions. A gentle smile, however small, helps us to take what is happening less personally, and supports healthy processing.

Third is to try self-comforting talk. This can be interpreted as a kind of re-parenting, where we engage in a reassuring inner dialogue as if we were calming ourselves as children. Providing gentle guidance to ourselves can help us re-orient our perspectives of current circumstances.
When cortisol levels are soaring, the inner world can feel chaotic and threatening, hampering our ability to cultivate intimacy and connection with self. When this is the case, use a cortisol lowering technique first; examples of these are provided below.

Recall a time recently when you felt acutely threatened. Which response was triggered? Fight, flight or freeze? Which response is the most common for you in stressful situations? Is there a stress busting or mindfulness tool you could try that that resonates with you, enabling you to re-orient in those moments?

Reversing Chronic Sympathetic Response
Together, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems create our experience of stress. The sympathetic system is designed to allow us to escape or conquer danger. It is meant to be a brief response, lasting only as long as necessary to accomplish its purpose. Once the threat dissipates, the purpose of the parasympathetic system is to kick in and help us relax and reverse the effects of the sympathetic system. The problem is that in today’s world, we are over stimulated by external stressors or by habitual rumination on imagined threats, and so we often end up chronically stuck in the sympathetic nervous system’s biological loop. Without enough stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system to rebalance us, we get no reprieve from daily tension and anxiety.

Reversing the chronic stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system has four basic steps:
1. Awareness: recognize when the sympathetic system is triggered,
2. Non-attachment: step back to objectively assess whether the situation is a threat,
3. Re-orientation: re-orient our perspective (this can mean changing the situation or changing our mind about the situation)
4. Ritual: take an action that triggers the parasympathetic system (relaxation response).

Here is a further breakdown of these steps:
1. Step back (non-attachment) from the anxiety; not attaching to the emotion but positioning oneself as an impartial witness. To assist in the ability to step back, cultivate a sense of curiosity about the situation, whether it be something new about how you are perceiving the experience (impacting the inner world) or something new about the context (a difference in the outer world).
2. Accept what is happening; noticing and accepting intense emotions (fear, anxiety) as a natural biological response to the sympathetic system being triggered. These intense emotional and now biological feelings are a normal chemical reaction within the human experience of stress (resulting from our interpretation of an uncomfortable emotion, which may or may not be based on accurate thoughts).
3. Remove the stressor and if you cannot remove it, adopt a positive mindset (Part VII elaborates on strategic optimism. Experiences of stress are a necessary reminder to attend to a perceived feeling of threat and to work through it with mindfulness. Every cue to practice mindfulness is an opportunity to assess the reality of the situation, deciphering if it is an actual or imagined threat, and to resolve unhealed past experiences/trauma.
4. There are a variety of techniques that trigger the parasympathetic nervous system, cueing the body to relax. These techniques put us in a sensing mode, enabling us to stay focused on the present moment. For example, we feel the floor/chair beneath us or the breath moving in an out of the body; we can observe our surroundings, letting any distracting stimuli rise and then fall into the background. When emotions feel intense, active relaxation and breathing exercises are most helpful, such as stretching, or taking 5 long deep breaths or 4-7-8 breathing (described below). Passive
breathing, where the focus is to observe the breath rather than control it, is a great way to relax and to practice non-attachment but is not always so helpful when cortisol levels are soaring.

**Interrupting Fight and Flight via Breathing Techniques**

Controlled breathing techniques improve mental function, support our ability to focus, heighten mood, and reduce cortisol levels (Ma, Yue, Gong, Zhang, Duan, Shi, Wei, & Li, 2017; Perciavalle, Blandini, Fecarotta, Buscemi, Di Corrado, Bertolo, Fichera, & Coco, 2017). Below, are examples of controlled breathing techniques that can have a variety of benefits, including interrupting the sympathetic nervous system/stress response. Breathing in these ways requires concentration, enabling an ability to step back from self-destructive thoughts and triggers relaxation by both interrupting the fight-flight-freeze response and releasing beneficial hormones that relaxes our muscles, lowers our heart rate and blood pressure. It is common to feel dizzy when doing these techniques, so remember to start slow and to titrate the practices if you are pregnancy or during certain activities that could pose a safety risk, such as driving. As I refer to below, mindful and full inhalations are often done through the nose with the tongue on the upper palate (roof of the mouth). During most sitting meditations, both the inhale and exhale are done through the nose. However, during breathing exercises that promote cleansing/purification, regeneration, and the transmutation or release of difficult emotions, the exhalation is often done through the mouth; this promotes a full exhalation and emotional release. On a final note, there is no need to complicate mindful breathing. Breathing deeply in and out of the belly is often enough to attain a mental, emotional, and biological shift. The below exercises promote a greater ability to interrupt the stress response (sympathetic nervous system) and to trigger the relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system).

**The 4-7-8 technique.** Begin by emptying your lungs with an exhale through the mouth. With your tongue resting on your upper palate (roof of mouth), inhale for 4 seconds through the nose. Hold for 7 seconds. Exhale again through the mouth for 8 seconds, making a whoosh sound to exhale more thoroughly.

**The 4x4 technique.** Begin with an exhale through your mouth to empty your lungs. With your tongue resting on your upper palate (roof of mouth), breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. Hold for four seconds. Exhale through your mouth for four seconds. Hold for four seconds. Breathe in through your nose for four seconds, etc. Start with four breath cycles to begin and adapt according to your desire, timing, and ability.

**Breath of fire.** This a yogic pranayama practice that invigorates and clears. With a straight spine, closed eyes and mouth, you will rapidly inhale and exhale with a focus on snapping the naval back to the spine as the breath is pushed out of the body. The breaths are quick, 2-3 cycles per second. To start, limit these sessions to 15 seconds.

**Sighing.** A long exhale and two-second pause before inhaling results in a release of physiological tension in those who are anxiety prone (Vieminx, Van Diest, & Van den Bergh, 2016).

**Breath counting.** Breath counting facilitates an ability to focus on the breath, interrupting the thought rumination that often spurs on the stress response. Breath counting also builds concentration by improving your ability to sustain mindfulness/meditation. Observe your breath as it enters and exits your body, counting each exhale up to 5 and then starting again at 1. As your skills improve, increase your count up to 10.

**Working with the Freeze Response**

Roper (2019), a Canadian spiritual health practitioner, describes the freeze response as an involuntary survival mechanism often resulting in emotional numbness and detachment, otherwise described as dissociation. In environments of unconditional positive regard, where we feel safe to express ourselves, we learn to regulate our emotions. If we did not have this environment in our developmental years, our nervous
system may not have learned how to regulate when uncomfortable emotions presented. As a result, in high stimulus environments where relationally safe connections are lacking, we are more prone to freeze/dissociate as this was the mechanism that felt necessary to survive in our developmental years. There are no quick fixes for these subconscious reactions; rather, it requires establishing an internal and external environment of safety, to allow the trapped emotional energy to discharge, healing past wounds so that we can return to present time.

Faced with real or perceived threat the sympathetic nervous system is activated but if in the split second unconscious assessment of the threat we determine that fight or flight won’t work, perhaps because it did not work in the past - then the parasympathetic freeze kicks in, trapping the activated energy. The PNS will release the brake when the threat is gone; then the stuck SNS energy needs to be released. We can help this process by establishing a sense of safety - grounding, re-orienting, and connecting. To support the emotional/energetic discharge necessary to release the past trauma, we can use movement as a release, much like animals shake after trauma, so we too can shake off or stretch it out, releasing the trapped energy (Roper, 2019).

Mindfulness is key to noticing the process, making consciousness what is unconsciousness, and working gently and compassionately with ourselves to re-balance the nervous system. Much of the work needs to be pre/post trigger: establishing, becoming familiar with those practices so we can use them right away; knowing/anticipating our triggers; demonstrating to ourselves that we have resources we may not have had in times of earlier trauma; noticing the ways we unconsciously try to balance our nervous system - which may not be healthy / effective, such as addictive behavior - and replacing them with tools that feel comforting, nurturing us into balance. Once we have worked with our biology in this self-compassionate way, we can then recognize the old thought patterns that may have felt true at one time, but are not longer necessary/true now. Recognizing these thought patterns enables us to replace them with affirmations that are true in the here and now, creating a sense of safety that was previously lacking.

**Clearing Practice: Interrupting the Freeze Response**
When overwhelmed by sensations (often beginning with threatening thoughts/old belief systems), the parasympathetic system, responsible for the relaxation response, causes the system to minimize stimuli to the point of what some describe as feeling numb or dissociated. This response is the fight-or-flight response put on hold (Kozlowska, Walker, McLean, & Carrive, 2015). In this state, sensations are dulled, especially those related to bodily sensations such as emotional and physical connection. Because the freeze state is often linked to past trauma, causing us to dissociate, which is an involuntary and defensive/protective mechanism, we can interrupt by reconnecting to the here and now. We can reconnect to the here and now by tracking physical body sensations such as how the breath feels moving in and out of the body or how the air feels on our skin. The key is to keep the focus on physical sensations, taking the attention away from the triggered emotions that relate more to past trauma than current reality. Keeping the focus on physical sensation related to the here and now diffuses the sense of threat related to past trauma. While tracking physical sensations, allowing them to be as they are, enabling them to surface, it is not uncommon for people to experience tingling, shaking, and tremors as they release the energy (Levine, 2010).

If focusing on the body is too difficult because of intense threatening emotions, tracking via the visual channel is another way to re-ground. When animals feel immobilized because of the freeze response, their visual channel remains intact, enabling them to continue scanning their environment for potential threats ((Kozlowska, Walker, McLean, & Carrive, 2015). Using this visual channel to reconnect to the here and now is a gentle and effective way to reconnect to gain perspective by reconnecting to the here and now.

💡 Begin with your eyes open, scan your environment for an object you feel neutral about, with no obvious positive or negative emotions associated to it. Now close your eyes and envision this object in your
mind’s eye. Again, open your eyes and scan your environment for a neutral object, paying close attention to the details such as its texture and color. Close your eyes and envision the object in your mind’s eye. Open your eyes once again, scanning your environment, not focusing on any one object. Now close your eyes and envision yourself in the here and now. As you see yourself as you are in this moment, shower yourself with loving-kindness. You can shower yourself with loving-kindness in a variety of ways. What is most important is that it feels genuine. For instance, you may use your breath, blowing love and compassion on yourself with each exhale. For those who are more visual, you could shower yourself in a golden light, letting it warm and nurture you. Others may resonate more with mantras, choosing words to nurture yourself in the hear and now. As you immerse in loving-kindness, subtly smile, connecting to the warmth of this nurturing moment. When you are ready open your eyes, feel your feet on the floor, and reflect on how you feel in this moment. Can you sense a greater space, non-attachment, to what previously felt threatening? If you feel ready to take this exercise a step further, while in this safe space, surrounded by loving-kindness, build on this sense of connection by doing something that taps into desire, something you will enjoy. Choose an activity that is easy to attend to in the moment like making a tea, having a hot shower, playing an instrument, or sitting in the warm sun.

**Cortisol Lowering Activities**

Besides the stress busters described above (comforting touch, subtle smiling, and reassuring self-talk), there are so many activities we can use as rituals to manage our stress. The key is to find one that is most effective for you, one you can immerse in. Immersing in an activity interrupts the thinking mind, which is often the source of stressful thoughts and emotions. When we move from thinking to sensing, we ground ourselves in the moment. Grounding in the moment enables us to step back (non-attachment) from perceived threats so we can keep them in perspective. As discussed earlier, stimuli in themselves are not stressful, it is our perception of the stimuli as a threat to our basic needs that produces stress. When we step back, gaining an objective perspective, we can better manage the stimuli before it becomes a chronic stressor.

We can use activities to gain perspective, moving us to the sensing mind, and with a more objective perspective, we are more able to manage stress. For example, creative and expressive activities tap our desires, drawing us in, enabling us to immerse in the moment. Some do this by playing or listening to music, getting lost in the beat of a drum, poetry, sketching, sexual activity, dance, or journaling. Other moments may call for something more physical, such as intense cardio, yoga, or stretching. I provide a list below, which is not exhaustive, but offers a sampling of cortisol lowering techniques that show promise in the literature.

**Forest bathing** is a translation from the Japanese word “shinrin-yoku” (森林浴). It means spending contemplative time immersed in nature, at a leisurely pace and paying special attention to the sensory experience. Also called “forest therapy”, forest bathing is effective in reducing anxiety, depression and anger, while increasing vigor and boosting the immune system even after the immersion experience (Li, 2010; Park, Tsunetsugu, Kasetani, Hirano, Kagawa, & Sato, 2007).

**Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)** involves tapping various energy points on the body while repeating a mantra that correlates with a desired emotional state. During the process, one addresses a current stressor or brings up a stressful memory of the past (often lying beneath a current stressor) with compassionate awareness while tapping on acupressure points. EFT shows promise in the research, with over a 100 studies investigating its impact. Results in include a reduce anxiety and as a treatment for chronic Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (Church, Hawk, Brooks, Toukolehto, Wren, Dinter, & Stein, 2013; Clond, 2016) and changes in molecular genomics such as microRNA expression (Yount et al., 2019).
**Sustained stretches** mobilize soft tissue, improve flexibility and range of motion, and reduces cortisol levels with lasting effects going into the following day (Corey, Epel, Schembri, Pawlowsky, Cole, Rosario, Barrett-Connor, & Araneta, Kanaya, 2014). Restorative Yoga, a practice centered around sustained stretches and meditation, reduces cortisol and improves immune function (Suzuki, Lee & Akama, 2018).

**Exercise** is an effective way to reduce cortisol, improve mental function, improve the immune system, and reduce the risk of developing numerous chronic diseases (Basso & Suzuki, 2017). In addition to stress mitigation, regular exercise reduces the risk of a number of health conditions including cancers, diabetes, and heart disease (Kyu, Bachman, Alexander, Mumford, Afshin, Estep et al., 2016). While there is still debate about the benefits of different types and durations of exercise, finding something you enjoy is an act of self-kindness and provides the motivation to do it regularly.

**Shaking it off with self-induced tremors, intense bouts of exercise or dancing** can be useful to release acute and chronic stress and trauma. Much like animals will tremble after an acutely stressful event, we too can release stress and trauma in a similar way. There is a formal, self-induced form of shaking it off involving stretching major muscle groups in the legs followed by self-induced tremors. The stretching and tremors discharge negative energy and activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which some claim has significant impacts on one’s perception of their health, wellness, and overall quality of life (Berceli, Salmon, Bonifás, & Ndefo, 2014). Informally, as elaborated on below, we can also gain some benefits by bringing awareness to the stress and tension and then vigorously shaking the body, imagining it fall away as you do so. Short bursts of exercise or dancing can have a similar shake it off effect.

**Acupuncture** can also reduce cortisol (Eshkevari, Permaul, & Mulroney, 2013), depression, and anxiety (Carvalho, Weires, Ebling, De Souza Rabbo Padilha, Ferrão, & Vercelino, 2013).

**Aromatherapy with massage** has shown significant effects, decreasing stress and anxiety, and improving immune function (Chen, Chou, Yang, Tsai, Chang, & Liaw, 2017; Cooke, Holzhauser, Jones, Davis, & Finucane, 2007). Aromatherapy without an adjunct therapy seems to have inconclusive results.

The experience of sustained stress spills over into all areas of our lives, including our ability to sleep. **Reflexology** is a non-invasive, easy to perform, and may improve quality of sleep (Li, Chen, Gau, & Huang, 2011).

A self-**Reiki practice** focuses on energy fields and can be an effective stress reduction tool (Helali, 2016).

It is not necessary or perhaps even advisable to adopt all these activities in your life. However, if you do not already have some of these tools in your toolkit, it is probably time to start experimenting to find practices that work for you.

**A Warning on Using Humor to Manage Stress**

As discussed in part II, humor can promote connection and congruence, but it can also do the opposite. At its best, humor promotes objectivity and our related ability to keep things in perspective and to optimistically re-orient ourselves in situations that play out in unexpected or unfavorable ways. Optimistic reorientation is a characteristic of sense of coherence and when successful, it can prevent stimulus from feeling threatening/stressful. Without this objective re-orientation, we are prone to attach to thoughts and emotions that can produce unnecessary suffering. Similar to the stress mitigation strategies described above, humor also interrupts the stress response (triggering the parasympathetic system/relaxation), shaking us free from our attachment to uncomfortable emotions that result when we ruminate on threatening thoughts. All of these benefits, objectivity, perspective keeping, and optimistic re-orientation promote a greater ability to manage our emotions.

When used productively, humor actually promotes deeper learning by helping us relax and to focus, resulting in a greater motivation to actively take part in the learning process (Savage, Lujan, Thipparthi, & DiCarlo, 2017). Another benefit of humor is that it can promote social connection by underscoring common
ground such as shared understanding, shared stories, and the common primal desires to laugh and to experience pleasure (Savage et al., 2017). Humor connects us to others by engaging our hearts with laughter and by promoting authenticity through expression of the ‘real’ self. Like a spoon full of sugar mixed into the medicine, humor can make communication easier to deliver and more palatable for others. Because of its healing power, humor can be seen as sweet medicine itself.

Despite all these potential benefits, we can also use humor in ways that do more harm than good. For instance, if we use humor in a self-deprecating manner (this reinforces incongruence), we are at greater risk of feeling depressed (Rnic, Dozois, & Martin, 2016). In the same way that using self-destructive humor promotes disconnection within ourselves, humor that mocks others promotes disconnection with people around us. Humor that dehumanizes is never helpful. But even relatively benign humor can be unhelpful when we overuse it for escapism. If we use humor to distract ourselves from inner discord (unresolved trauma or an incongruency in our life), we may miss opportunities to address the wound or discomforts trying to get our attention.

**The Disconnected Self**

As humans, we all strive for a balance between order and chaos. The sweet spot of this balance is different for all of us, making it imperative to listen to the emotional messages that cue when we feel overwhelmed by chaos or trapped by order. When we lose our connection with the inner world, we lose contact with the compass that guides and aligns us. The disconnected self feels threatened by emotional messages; they feel ambiguous, confusing, and haunting when we cannot view and interpret them through the lens of the higher, connected, and empowered self.

The disconnected self yearns for the love that can only come through connection; as a result, it feverishly seeks belonging and approval from the external world. When events or people in the external world threaten our sense of belonging and approval, the disconnected self’s very being feels threatened, ushering in acute feelings of stress. Love and acceptance are primary human needs and because of this, we often do whatever it takes to attain them, including rejecting and hiding the parts of ourselves that we believe are unlovable. The disconnected self, believing it must play to an ‘ideal’ to be worthy of love, becomes more and more incongruent and within this incongruence, shame festers. The emotional messages that make it across the disconnected threshold cry out, sending warning after warning. Each warning feels like an ultimatum that if articulated, may sound something like this:

- **Something is wrong, the authentic parts of you, the magic you hold, the power you wield, it longs to walk with you in the light; to hold you in suffering, to help you in uncertainty…it waits to be called out from the shadow. The thoughts and actions you are serving do not align with your essence.**
- ‘You’ are not living because the ‘real’ you remains in the shadow. The fictional character (the ‘ideal’) that you are projecting into the world is powerless, lonely, and terrified of being exposed for the illusion it is.

Yes, bringing your ‘real’ self into the light comes with risks. Change can be difficult for many and as a result, some will disapprove of your authentic expression. Because many still operate from a place of fear, the ‘real’ and empowered self may threaten the expectations and order of those close to you. They may even grieve the loss of what was for a time; this is normal and it will pass. You are part of a much larger puzzle: as you move your puzzle pieces, you push against the edges of the pieces around you, unearthing all sorts of projections; this is normal and it will pass. While this journey to wholeness, to connection, may come with suffering, when that suffering comes, you will be held, nurtured, and empowered by the immeasurable peace and love found in the inner world. The risk of remaining disconnected, unable to really live, is far greater.

*Living requires light; light exposes the real self; real is beautiful; step into the light*
Substance Use: Using to Escape or to Heal?
We all use substances in different forms and for different reasons. Where we often run into problems is when we use substances to escape from stressful thoughts and emotions, ignoring our internal alert system and avoiding the pain of old wounds. Emotional pain, much like the pain produced from a sliver, cues us to deal with a potential threat. Whether or not it is an actual threat, if it feels like a threat it is worthy of our attention. Avoiding and escaping only causes wounds to fester, rather than going through a mindful investigation of the veracity of the thoughts behind the feeling (re-orienting our perspective), or when needed, ensuing in a self-compassionate grieving process that enables the wound to heal. Feeling our wounds is part of the healing process. Allowing ourselves to feel a wound (even if it involves suffering) is like saying, “I see you, I hear you, I feel your pain, and I am here for you.” Like grieving, healing a wound is a process we must walk through, not around.

“No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell” (Jung).

The question is not whether we use substances; it is ‘why’ we are using them. Having a third-party to check in with provides a more objective perspective, when we cannot attain it ourselves. For example, using pharmaceuticals in partnership with a physician, or taking advice from a counsellor, trusting that they have our best interests in mind.

Soaking in the Inner World: Moving through the Layers

“No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell” (Jung).

So far, I’ve mentioned a few times the idea of “dropping” into the inner world. Let me explain a little more what I mean by that. For me, and for many others, the inner world is what I experience when I calm my body and let external stimuli fall into the background, turning my attention to internal stimuli. I call it an inner “world” because of the complexity of sensation and experience I perceive when I focus internally. And I use verbs like “dropping” and “soaking” and “sinking” to describe the experience this quiet inner centering because it feels like settling deeper into myself. Some people find a formal practice or rituals, taking regular time to go inward through “meditation,” “contemplation,” or even “prayer”. The term is not so important as the experience and the effect of supporting our congruence, that is, closing the distance between our “real” and “ideal” selves.

Based on my experience, the inner experience presents itself in layers, intertwining with our states of consciousness as we drop deeper into the inner world. The first, or most palpable layer, is the physical. The physical layer is often represented by sensations related to tension, pain, and restlessness.

Once our thoughts and physical sensations fall into the background, we can draw quietly into our inner world, creating space for unresolved emotions to bubble up for healing. Many people stop at the emotional layer, unable to witness their emotions objectively. When our emotions bubble up and we don’t practice non-attachment, we are prone to interpreting feelings as facts rather than information. In turn, when we experience our emotions as facts, we are more likely to feel threatened and less likely to feel equipped to resolve whatever challenge is at hand. Non-attachment, on the other hand, gives us the ability to view our emotional emotions as information, separate from our essence, and to avoid over identifying with them. To move through the emotional layer of our inner world, we must engage mindfulness, practice non-attachment, and choose to self-soothe. With objectivity and self-compassion, we can allow unresolved emotions from the past to come up, stay as long as they need to heal and when ready, dissipate. As we
practice softening through the physical, sinking deeper into the emotional, clearing as we go, we find a sense of safety within. The safety that can be cultivated in an inner world that is characterized by unconditional and positive connection to the higher self, much like a loyal friend, a nurturing parent, and a loving protector. Within such a safe inner world, the more vulnerable parts of ourselves, those parts that faced rejection at some point in our life, can emerge from the shadows. In the third layer we connect to essence; it is here that we taste, even if for fleeting moments, reprieve, peace, and a sense of euphoria that erupts from an endless sea of love within.

For many, taking refuge in their inner world might be vaguely familiar, recalling a time in childhood when they found refuge in a safe inner space. At some point, after pushing parts of our ‘real’ self into the shadows (making us incongruent), we may have experienced shame or anxiety that we did not have the maturity to process, and so we stopped visiting the inner world. Overtime, as shadows grow, fueling the shame within, the outer world became a welcome distraction, luring us away from the mounting trauma within. As a result, the inner world evolved into a distant and nostalgic memory. We often hear the whisper, calling us back, but it can feel too dangerous to approach. We end up filling our lives with activities, media, and other noise to avoid the silent space within. When we avoid facing our inner pain, we are actually missing out on a great gift.

**Yes, our inner experience is a gift.** With practice, we gain confidence as we come to see the benefit of being present with our emotions, even and especially the uncomfortable ones. As we learn to step back and witness our emotions as messages, letters to open, we gain insight into wounds that are ready to heal. Re-orientation enables us to move through the physical and emotional layers, empowered by a newfound ability to provide unconditional positive regard for whatever arises, acknowledging, digesting, and when ready, releasing. As we remove a layer, there is often another layer underneath, one that until now, we were not ready for; another piece of ourselves to retrieve from the shadows. Remember, we spent many years pushing components of our ‘real’ self into the shadows; it can take just as many years to retrieve them. Patience is difficult, but we must not rush. Healing occurs as we are ready, titrated to a enable us to digest past traumas in layers. Recognizing this, we will can endure suffering, trusting that we will be held and that we will not be given more than we can handle.

*You are not your emotions; emotions are your messengers.*

Within every healing moment, we can find a gift within the suffering. Once we remove a layer there is a treasure waiting, a renewed sense of clarity, peace, and connection; it is in this space, however fleeting, that we get a glimpse of our essence. One glimpse of our essence (spirit) is enough to keep us coming back, propelling us forward for more inner connection, making the whispers of the inner world louder, calling us inward and in time we will go, as our passion will outweigh our fear.

Removing the layers is the path to congruence, enabling our ‘real’ self to align with our ‘ideal’ self. Cultural assimilation and conformity perpetuate the creation and development of the shadow self (incongruence). While some consider the idea of connecting to desire and self-actualizing activities selfish, it is often the opposite. Similar to the metaphor of oxygen masks on airplanes, when we respond to our desires, which inspires us to fulfill our calling, our metaphorical cup fills up with so much abundance that we often feel compelled to contribute to others’ cups. In terms of unconditional positive regard, as children we deeply yearn to feel accepted for our ‘real’ selves. With this knowing we can then mirror the same unconditional positive regard inwardly (self-compassion), which then enables us to provide the same to others. As a result, a domino effect begins, where one realization triggers another and with these rapid, successive and cumulative changes, our orientation to life drastically shifts. We no longer feel the need to compete with others, instead we are driven by a cause greater than ourselves, inspiring us to help others live their calling. On the other hand, when we repress desire, feelings of lack feed into scarcity fears, resulting in competitive and incongruent behaviors. As the biblical sentiment goes, “Love your neighbor as yourself”
(NIV, Luke 10:27). By learning to love and care for ourselves, we can provide the same genuine care/love for others.

**Attuning Practice: What soil are you growing in? From Enculturation to Emancipation**

Our experiences determine the soil or mindset from which we interpret stimuli and from which we make meaning. Reflecting on these experiences and the resulting soil from which we are enculturated in, enables awareness, acceptance, and an objective evaluation of our belief systems. Our orientation to life, or sense of coherence, determines our confidence, how grounded we are to the inner world, our ability to connect and feel empowered, and our ability to trust that we have what it takes to effectively manage challenges. These components of sense of coherence determine our capacity to forge deeper roots. The depth of our roots impacts our ability to thrive, despite the weather swirling around us. We can achieve a greater awareness (objective observation) of our orientation to life through mindfulness, non-attachment, and a self-compassionate investigation of the thoughts we ruminate on.

Because we are all connected, unresolved and compounding pain and suffering has ripple effects on others. Eventually, repressed emotions get triggered, causing us to project our suffering onto others. As a reminder, according to Carl Jung, nearly every enduring irritation we feel about others is a projection of the shame we feel about our incongruence, which can be traced back to an unaccepted and therefore unintegrated part (including repressed emotions) of our ‘real’ selves. The more of our ‘real’ self that remains repressed, the more we project our shame (a natural by-product of incongruence) onto others (Jung, 1970).

Our way of being springs in part from our conditioning, impacting our typical mindset. For example, when raised in an environment where the dominant belief is that there is abundant opportunity for all, we are more likely to cheer others on in their success, bolstering our colleagues’ efforts whenever possible. When raised in an environment where a scarcity mindset reigns, we are more likely to see colleagues as threatening competitors. When we are aware of our mindset tendencies (the soil we developed in) when an event occurs, we are more likely to interrupt the old thought program, stepping back to investigate it (non-attachment) before we react.

Consider your own tendencies. When you consider your orientation to life, how confident are you in your inner resources to manage the swirling stimuli of the outer world? How often do you look inward for guidance as opposed to solely relying on the advice of others?

Recall a recent event where you felt threatened by a person or event. How did your mindset or perception of a potential threat to a primary need impact your experience of the stimuli/stressor? How did it affect your decisions and relationships? Now that you have space between the event and this moment (non-attachment), was the stimuli an actual threat to a basic need?

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**Practice Tips:**

In the previous chapter, I referred to curiosity and self-compassion as mindfulness super powers. **Being mindful begins with cultivating a sense of curiosity about the present moment.** This curiosity enables us to immerse, staving off boredom and the incessant dependence on rapidly changing external stimulation. **Staying with a mindfulness practice requires that we also practice self-compassion,** as without this unconditional positive regard, we are prone to get frustrated, often spiralling into self-destructive thoughts, causing our mindfulness practice to feel more like self-punishment than self-care. Through curiosity, we gain the interest and resulting motivation to continue exploring the intricacies is the inner and outer world.
Through self-compassion, we attain the grace and patience to celebrate progress, despite our imperfections and as a result, we begin to trust the process.

To illustrate how we practice curiosity and self-compassion in the inner world, keep an eye out for self-limiting and self-labeling thoughts; allow them to come, take an interest in the message they are bringing, consider them objectively and heartfully, and then let them pass. Old thought patterns will often arise and with mindfulness, we can step back to investigate them and if no longer serving us, we can release them. We may need to investigate and release them many times but take comfort that the process is a worthy investment. Each time we release self-destructive thoughts, we become a little freer of their hold. Conversely, if we take thoughts as facts, failing to investigate them and overly attaching to them, we are more likely to engage in behaviours that undermine our wellbeing. For example, we all grapple with feeling not good enough or that we do not have enough (status, money, achievements, etc.) at times. When we let these fears fester, they result in negative thought rumination, breeding competitive work environments, and if unchecked, lead to fractured co-worker relationships and low morale.

Given that our past experiences and the culture(s) in which we grew up often inform which mindset we will act/react from, what role could mindful curiosity and self-compassion play?

Clearing Practice: Managing Thoughts and Uncomfortable Emotions

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty” (Maya Angelou).

With the rise of trauma-informed care initiatives, care providers are increasingly aware of the impact that trauma has on our patients. However, we rarely acknowledge how our own traumatic personal and professional experiences impact us as caregivers. As we develop our roots, gaining a sense of safety in our inner space, unresolved trauma will emerge. This is actually a good sign; it means we are ready to digest experiences we didn’t feel comfortable or ready to address before. As we practice allowing these experiences to bubble up, we gain a sense of confidence in our ability to welcome them, digest them, and when we are ready, we will let them go.

We cannot control when or which thoughts will spring up. However, we can control how we manage them. If we assume thoughts are true, they are likely to trigger reactions. Conversely, if we interpret thoughts as information to consider, which may or may not be true, we are more likely to manage them objectively, mitigating the stress response. The work of Katie and Mitchell (2003) provides a simple technique to objectively investigate the veracity and impact of our thoughts. There are five steps:

1. First, we acknowledge the thought by writing it down.
2. We cultivate a sense of curiosity by asking ourselves if it is true.
3. We dig deeper a bit deeper, asking ourselves if it is really true.
4. We ask ourselves how the thought, if it is true, is impacting our emotions and resulting reactions to those emotions.
5. Finally, we explore what we would feel and be like without the thought.
6. Taking it a step further, we consider alternative statements to turn around or challenge the initial thought.
Katie and Mitchell’s (2003) simple approach is an excellent way to interrupt old thought patterns, creating an opportunity to re-orient. When the chaff of untrue self-depreciating thoughts is cleared, our sense of the ‘real’ self and ‘ideal’ self converge, improving our sense of coherence. With a strengthened sense of coherence, we are in a better position to thrive.

**Emotional management**

Emotional management is about checking in with our emotions frequently. In this day and age, we spend a lot of time “checking in”, taking stock of our inboxes and social media accounts, to stay current on external happenings. Emotional management means keeping up to date with our internal happenings. Emotions may feel good or bad, but they are neither. Rather, emotions are biological responses to life events, based on previous life experiences and our resulting interpretations of whether the event will threaten our basic needs. When viewed in this way, we can maintain objectivity, receiving the information that emotions provide us, without feeling attached, identified with, or threatened by them (this is practicing non-attachment). When we deny our emotional messages, subconscious projections emerge, resulting in reactions and impulsive behaviors. Resisting inner messages and reacting out of fear leads to incongruence and, as described in Part I, incongruence fuels shame. The more shame we feel inside, the more likely we will avoid the inner world, fearing the discomfort that we find there. This cycle of denial, shame and fear goes on until we interrupt it. We can interrupt the cycle by checking our emotional inbox. It is helpful to view our emotional messages as alerts, enabling us to recognize that dissonance is speaking. When we check our emotional messages, we are less likely to store them as trauma. Engaging with our emotions in this way improves our emotional intelligence; this promotes intuitive and creative abilities, deepens our relationships, and enables us to make decisions congruent with our values and goals.

When you experience uncomfortable feelings, which is common during sustained mindfulness, try a few of these techniques. See what works best for you. When focused on your inner world, if an emotion is too difficult to observe, you can:

- Focus on your exhalation breath, which helps discharge emotions, or
- Imagine breathing white light in through your belly and out through your heart, transmuting anxiety through and out of your heart, or,
- Imagine breathing in white light through the top of your head, then moving it deep down into your belly (or the place in your body where the emotion is felt), and then, on your exhale, imagine it discharging the emotion out of your inner space via powerful rays of light.

These breathing and visualization practices help us to get unstuck with the experience of overwhelming emotion.

**Clearing Practice: “Shake it Off” or “Stretch it Out”**

Have you ever noticed that after an animal has an altercation with another animal, or after an animal has an unpleasant experience, they perform a whole-body shake? This is the way that animals reset after their fight-flight-freeze response has been activated. We too are animals, and we can get relief by doing a few minutes of any vigorous activity that enables us to let our energy loose. Examples are jumping, running, dancing, doing a full body shake down (“wiggling it out”), etc. Shaking off tension can be done alone where we don’t feel inhibited and can just let loose. To shake off tension, do what feels right in the moment, the key is to follow your instincts, be authentic, and to release. As a bonus, the exercise of moving freely and spontaneously is an excellent way to practice authenticity.
As children, we engaged in these authentic activities spontaneously. As adults, however, we must consciously go through the motions, re-learning what it feels like to follow our bodies’ cues, and to do so authentically and freely.

At times, tension will feel stuck, especially in the major muscle groups of the lower body (for example, hips are a common place where tension gets caught and stored). Holding stretches or yoga positions that release those areas is an excellent way to release pent up energy. The key is to hold the stretch for an extended period and to soften the tension with your inhalation, releasing it bit by bit with your exhalation. Stretch until it is uncomfortable, holding it there and breathing into the discomfort. The discomfort we feel when stretching is an excellent way to practice non-attachment, accepting, and softening our resistance/tension. Wait for the release as your body opens and you feel the energy shift. Go deeper into the stretch, hold, breathe into it, and let it go. Take time to reflect afterward, how did it feel during the activity? How did it feel when complete? Did any shifts occur? When we hold a stretch, letting the physical discomfort linger, we practice non-attachment (taking a mental step back), enabling our experience to be as it is. Use the breath to soften the tension. Practicing in this way builds our emotional management skills and sense of coherence, teaching us how to work with discomfort without identifying and attaching to it.

Navigating Hostility/Horizontal Violence among Co-workers

“Violence is what happens when we don’t know what else to do with our suffering” (Palmer, 2004). Self-oriented perfectionism can lead to other or socially prescribed perfectionism. The perceived unmet need from which perfectionism arises is a felt lack of acceptance and belonging for our real self: a lack of congruence. Perfectionism is on a spectrum, and many of us take on perfectionistic tendencies at various points in our day and in our lives. Mild bouts of perfectionism can bring positives, such as high-quality work, dependability, and a strong work ethic. Extreme perfectionism, on the other hand, becomes toxic.

The tendency toward perfectionism is born in childhood, where the belief that our real self is not good enough, not worthy ‘as is’ of love and acceptance. As an act of survival, we push down the real self and replaces it with an ‘ideal’ that will be more palatable to those from whom we feel we need approval. Our felt need to be an unrealistic ‘ideal’ compensates for the shame we experience when we believe our ‘real' self is not good enough.

In maladaptive perfectionism, we set perfectionistic standards unsustainably high. To fall short of the ideal feels like a personal failing and perpetuates incongruence leading to shame, anxiety, and depression (Flett, Madorsky, Hewitt, & Heisel, 2002). As a result of the shame born from individual incongruence, co-workers project their shame onto each other through competitive and socially dominant ways. Social dominance and the horizontal violence that often results, is a natural outcome of the snowball effect of shame.

Social dominance breeds a hierarchical orientation to the world. Those coming from a socially dominant orientation are motivated to wield power over others. When motivated by a hierarchical/power over orientation, we are more likely to pursue self-interests over group interests. As a result, if work environments are full of socially dominance, there is often a lack of empathy for co-workers, more exclusion and scrutiny of those with less status, a lack of desire to help co-workers without personal gain, and a high degree of hostility towards anyone who might challenge the hierarchy.

When we understand that the horizontal violence is fueled by incongruence, the way out becomes clearer. Those that are perpetuating socially dominant ways of being are victims of shame. Those with the most shame are at the greatest risk of perpetuating the victim perpetrator cycle. Shaming them even more...
by witch hunting workplace ‘bullies’ (determined to find a perpetrator) only works to heap on more shame and fails to address the suffering at its roots. Those who project hurt were also victims and when we fixate on labelling a person in black and white terms, we fail to connect to the human and the suffering beneath the label; as a result, we perpetuate the victim-perpetrator cycle. Relational dynamics are complex, often involving unresolved traumatic events of the past. When unresolved trauma (remember, trauma is the stored-up energy from painful experiences that were not fully processed and healed/released) from the past transfers into our current experience, our ability to keep events in perspective is limited; this is emotional transference. Practically speaking, emotional transference happens frequently, evident in those moments when someone or something triggers an emotion that is out of proportion to the event. While the underlying trauma may not be immediately evident, the intense emotional response makes it difficult, even impossible, to react only to the situation before us. This form of emotional transference is a significant component of our experience of shame and our subjective interpretation of events (Dzurec, Kennison, & Gillen, 2017). Cultivating awareness in these moments is necessary to step back (non-attachment), working with our fear (not resisting it) and to then objectively investigate the deeper source of our emotional angst.

To address social dominance, even though our efforts to confront ‘bullies’ head on may have good intentions, “shaming the shamer” only perpetuates the victim-perpetrator cycle and promotes incongruence for the shamer and in the workplace. So, what does work? Recognizing the suffering behind the shaming behavior and responding with compassion; this is unconditional positive regard and it is the antidote to shame (Sanderson, 2015). Because shame is at the roots of incongruence and resulting horizontal violence, unconditional positive regard solves the ongoing problems associated with workplaces ruled by these competitive and socially dominant ways of being. While it may sound trite, perhaps even impossible, when we understand that co-worker hostility results from personal shame and suffering, offering compassion as a solution is not so farfetched. Environments characterized by conditional regard, where employees must assimilate to a prescribed way of being, meeting ‘ideal’ conditions, to gain acceptance, promote incongruent cultures, which promote incongruent employees and vice versa.

To illustrate how acting incongruently can play out in the workplace, consider Tom’s experience:

Tom’s Story: Tom is a caregiver who has been grappling with chronic back pain and his father recently passed away, resulting in a ripple effect of difficult emotions, lost sleep, and an overwhelming number of funeral related tasks to manage. He knows that he is edgier than normal but does his best to put on a cheery display during work hours. He arrives at work feeling exhausted, is distracted by his back pain, and because of stress, has only had a few hours of sleep. The angst he is feeling inside hovers just below the surface of his cheery display. As he enters report for the day, he learns they will work short, meaning a heavier workload and little to no time to rest. Gary, a colleague who moves slower than average and often appears disorganized and frazzled frequently asks others to help him with his work so that he can keep up with demands. In the past, when asked to take on extra tasks, Tom hasn’t felt like he could say no (playing to the cultural ‘ideal’); as a result, he complies with the request, but communicates his disapproval with shaming gestures (looks of disapproval, sighing, exclusion from conversations). Today, Tom’s fragile emotional state got the best of him and when Gary asked him to take on extra tasks, Tom’s repressed negative emotions erupt, and without even thinking he gives Gary a piece of his mind. Fed up with the frequent shaming gestures and now Tom’s harsh words, Gary storms off to the manager’s office to file a formal complaint. While Tom would typically avoid hurtful language, today, he lost control. Besides his back pain, losing his father, and his exhaustion, he now also feels ashamed of his reactive behavior, and fears he will be labeled a bully by his colleagues.

Tom’s story is a composite of several stories I have heard through my research. When in the field long enough, most of us can relate to Tom’s experience. For example, we have felt edgy or volatile because
of personal or work pressures. We have also felt the need to keep a lid on our angst out of fear we will be shamed (and rejected) by others if we appear weak. These pressures cause us to push down our ‘real’ emotions, taking on an ‘ideal’ but incongruent display (remember the concept of surface acting described in Part II?). Our true emotions fester in the shadows and, eventually, they spill out of us, causing us to involuntarily transmit our suffering onto others. Shaming Tom’s reactive behavior only perpetuates more shame. Workplace policies that prevent verbal aggression are essential, but not effective at managing cultural shaming. As in Tom’s case, when we feel hostile toward another, we will find subtle ways to let them know (think of the judging glances, sighs and exclusion). Passive aggression can have the same impact as direct expression of disapproval, sometimes worse because it makes it more difficult for the other person to respond.

When hostility between co-workers plays out, we can break the cycle of shame by bringing unconditional positive regard. For instance, even though Gary is slower to complete his tasks, Tom accepts that he struggles in this area, but also appreciates the extra time he takes to care for his patients, frequently bringing a positive attitude to the workspace. Tom can except this downside of Gary’s, knowing he is doing his best and that he has plenty of upsides too. This acceptance of Gary prevents him from feeling resentful of his shortcomings. Furthermore, because Tom is largely congruent at work (feeling safe to express himself), he says ‘no’ to extra requests when he is falling behind in his own work. Flipping the lens, if Gary can tap into unconditional positive regard, he would have a greater ability to step back from Tom’s projection (non-attachment), recognizing that Tom is not himself lately and that his overreaction isn’t personal (more on taking projections personally in Part IX). We all need to take responsibility for our actions, or more accurately, our reactions, making amends when necessary. Unconditional positive regard does not excuse abusive and shaming behavior. However, when we recognize the suffering beneath the projection, we are more able to tap into the compassion required to provide grace and forgiveness when we and our colleagues need it most.

“When another person makes you suffer, it is because he suffers deeply within himself, and his suffering is spilling over. He does not need punishment; he needs help” (Thich Nhat Hanh).

Self-compassion is unconditional positive regard for self, which is a precursor to providing compassion and unconditional positive regard for others. How we view ourselves informs how we treat ourselves, which in turn determines how we treat others. Self-compassion enables compassion for others, which is the antidote to work cultures entrenched in socially dominant, competitive, and hostile ways of being and relating. When we understand that the projections of others often trigger our own projections, we are more likely to recognize the opportunity to heal our unresolved dissonance rather than fixating on the other person’s problems. This willingness to use projections as a mirror, reflecting our own unresolved wounds is a core principle within the healing framework of Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs enable healing. If you aren’t familiar with the 12-step framework, three underlying tenants are:

1) Personal responsibility,
2) A focus on progress over perfection, and
3) Communities of unconditional positive regard.

The steps that people use to steer clear of alcohol can also help us steer clear of our shaming practices. When the community in which we belong provides unconditional positive regard, social dominance becomes unnecessary and unappealing. When sometimes tries to bring social dominance behavior into in a strong community, they are met with compassion. This compassion shows that we are unconditionally regarded, the threat that triggered the domination, the threat of rejection, is simply not there (Figure 5).
Unconditional Positive Regard solves incongruent/hostile work cultures. It is infectious; we learn it from others, which enables us to mirror it inwardly and then outwardly.

**Attuning to Self**

*If you don’t heal from what hurt you, you’ll bleed on people who didn’t cut you.* – *Author Unknown*

/ **Reorienting: learning to welcome and digest unresolved emotions one layer at a time.** Imagine a recent experience where you felt hurt or threatened by a co-worker’s words or behavior. Recall that shaming behaviors, the root of horizontal violence and hostility, are often a subconscious projection of one’s own suffering. From this lens, how might your response towards someone else’s projections personally change? How might you react differently, knowing that their behavior is essentially the spilling over of their own shame and suffering?

*Self-destructive thoughts are a natural by-product of incongruence and low self-compassion. How we treat ourselves is how we view and treat others.*

Taking it one step further, intense feelings of threat are a result of unresolved pain and trauma resurfacing in our lives. When we feel victimized by someone else’s behavior, we are taking their behavior
personally, interpreting it as a threat. When we bring awareness to the perceived threat, we have an opportunity to re-orient ourselves in the moment and to heal unresolved memories of the past. The moments when we are triggered or threatened act like a beacon, illuminating our old wounds. This illumination enables us to mindfully and compassionately validate where we feel hurt, digesting the feelings, and letting them go.

How might viewing moments of threat a beacon, or a call to heal, change your feelings about people and events that seem threatening? What reminders or practices might help you take on this perspective when conflict arises in the workplace?

Instead of asking, ‘why did this happen to me?’ ask yourself, ‘what is this experience trying to teach me?’

Clearing Practice: Coping with Bad Weather
By reflecting on personal experiences, there is an opportunity to develop awareness and acceptance of unique belief systems, values, and resources and/or barriers that impact the ability to practice self-compassion and engage in thriving. Self-reflection breeds self-awareness, which is a component of mindfulness.

Recall your typical day; the typical routines of your day. When do you feel anxious during your work and personal life? Is there a common trigger(s) that seems to bring about feelings of anxiety? Can you name the need that is going unmet and producing a feeling of threat?

Whether real or imagined, a perceived threat produces as stress response.

Try connecting to a feeling of threat that you often encounter at work, perhaps a person or an event that triggers a stress response. Once connected, try a new cortisol lowering tool (one of the above or one of your own). Sit for a minute or two after engaging in the activity. Consider how you feel and if you notice any shifts. Pick a word or phrase that describes how you feel. Reflecting on how each activity resonates (or fails to resonate) with you is an essential part of attuning to the tools that work best for you. A technique you try today may not stir you, but you may feel drawn to it in the future; consider it a new tool in your tool belt.

There is not one path for all, it takes courage to trust and prioritize the whisperings of the inner voice as the wisest councilor. The inner voice aligns with your calling, directing your path according to your unique needs and desires.

Are there some activities you find especially calming? Are you drawn to any activities in particular? These questions are an important part of connecting to your unique needs and desires, using mindfulness to override the tendency to gravitate toward what we think we ‘should’ do or ‘should’ like. If frustrating emerges, perhaps related to not feeling or connecting how we expected, use the opportunity to practice grace and kindness. Practice welcoming and accepting whatever feelings arise; remember that you are not the experience rather you are the observer of the experience. If feelings of discomfort arise, speak kindly to the discomfort, breathe compassion into it, and transmute it into love and light by exhaling it outward through your heart. Each time a feeling of discomfort arises, continue to welcome it, speak kindly to it, let it linger and then exhale it out of your heart space. Remain curious to how the process unfolds.

Strengthening Practice: Finding Sanctuary in your Roots
When we feel that a need is unmet, anxiety surfaces. In individualist cultures, like our Western culture, these perceived unmet needs are more likely to concern love, belonging, and self-esteem. Those who have root systems that feel safe, enriching, and accepting without condition, are more likely to engage in thriving, even when the going gets tough. Because of the safety of their root systems, bolstered by high congruence and sense of coherence, they are less likely to perceive these events as personal threats.

**Strengthening Practice: Generating Unconditional Positive Regard**


Generating unconditional positive regard for self (self-compassion) requires us to develop a relationship with self in our inner world. To do this, we must spend time there. Drop in to the inner world by closing your eyes and taking natural breaths in and out of your nose. You can move your focus from your head to your heart by imagining the breaths flowing in and out of your heart, perhaps even quietly repeating words that resonate with you, like ‘grace or mercy’ (bringing in loving-kindness for self) on the inhale and ‘compassion’ (pouring out loving-kindness to others) on the exhale; or, if you are a visual person, you might imagine white light coming in and out of your heart, purifying as it comes in and blessing others as it flows out.

Imagine somebody from whom you have felt a sense of unconditional positive regard. This can be a person, God, or Spirit, whatever resonates to you as unconditionally loving. You know no matter what you have done, what you are doing, what you will do, they emanate a sense of unconditional positive regard for you. While your eyes are closed and you continue to breathe through your heart, imagine this person or being in front of you, emanating love and compassion. Breathe in their atmosphere; embody their love and compassion.

**Strengthening Practice: Using Music to Stir and Deepen**

Music is a powerful tool to stir our desires. We all require and therefore desire to be loved for our ‘real’ self. It is a powerful way to cultivate feelings of connection to the self, promoting an ability to develop self-compassion.

Next time a song stirs you, turn your focus to your inner self, kindling a sense of appreciation for your essence, offering loving-kindness to all components of yourself. Think about the journey, the suffering, the triumphs, and the humorous side of life too. Send love and compassion to yourself, the self of the past, the present, and the future. Have your higher self soothe your ‘real’ self, the self that longs to be congruent, but is still struggling with the shame of incongruence. You are not alone, we (human kind) are all in the same boat, longing to be congruent and experiencing shame in times of incongruence.

**Strengthening Practice: Reconnection to the body**

“The body is your first home: ‘Breathing in, I arrive in my body. Breathing out, I am home’” (Thich Nhat Hanh).

While dropped in, imagine three or four ways in which you are grateful for your body. How has it served you? Move through the events of your life, acknowledging the journey you have traveled with your body. Recognize the resilience, forgiveness, and persistence of your body. Now, affirm yourself, “I am grateful for this body.” Feeling a sense of gratefulness is key. If you lose touch with the feeling, go back,
imagining and immersing yourself in the events for which you are grateful. Then go back into focusing on the phrase, remembering how you experience the beauty of this world through the senses of the body.

Other examples of affirmations that promote connection are:

“I am free to love and accept this body” (promotes acceptance)
“I have everything I need within; I already know all of the answers” (promotes trust)
“I am a beautiful, self-expressed being” (promotes self-expression/congruence)

Quietly repeat each phrase to yourself. You can choose one for an entire sitting, or transition to another that feels right to you. If it feels more natural to create your own phrase, then please do so! The more you can connect to the feeling underneath the words, the more effective this exercise will be.

A component of gratitude practice is attention. Attention is noticing and becoming aware of blessings that we normally take for granted. It is tuning into the many reasons for gratitude that already exist in our lives. Simultaneously, directing our attention this way in a focused manner blocks thoughts and perceptions that are inimical to gratitude, such as feelings of exaggerated deservingness or perceptions of victimhood. Focusing techniques that enhance attentiveness (such as mindfulness meditation) will be effective in increasing one’s appreciation for the simple blessings of life and in banishing incompatible thoughts from consciousness.

The act of writing, recording what we are grateful for, which underscores and validates passing thoughts into actions. By writing thoughts down, we facilitate their integration and digestion, internalizing them in a deeper and more meaningful way.
Clearing Practice Tip: Using ‘I’ Statements

Be watchful of using first-person statements when self-soothing. Speaking in first person feels natural and is helpful to develop a deeper connection as illustrated above, and to express ourselves to others, but they are not always helpful in the face of difficult emotions. ‘I’ statements can cause us to over-identify with thoughts and emotions, limiting our ability to objectively manage them. For instance, when anxiety wells up, if I say, “I have anxiety” or “my anxiety,” I am more likely to feel held hostage by the emotion, producing a felt threat that makes it difficult to impartially investigate its origin. However, if I say (or think), “there is anxiety, tell me about yourself? what thoughts or past experiences created you?” I am more likely to cultivate a sense of curiosity, free of threat, enabling me to provide acceptance and compassion (unconditional positive regard) toward the emotion and to identify the thoughts or area of incongruence at its roots. There are no hard and fast rules here, only suggestions for you to try, enabling you to identify what works best for you.

Speaking to emotions, as if they were their own living entities, promotes non-attachment and helps us to realize that the thoughts and emotions are messages to take into consideration rather than facts that define us. When we treat ourselves as a dear friend or suffering child, we have an opportunity to re-parent ourselves, making up for lost opportunities in our development years. Self-soothing is most effective when we talk to the suffering self, providing unconditional positive regard; this prevents us from interpreting thoughts and emotions as threats and promotes an ability to keep them in perspective.

Attuning Practice: Distinguishing Signal from Noise

Dropping into the inner world enables us to distinguish what to pay attention to (signal) and what to let fall into the background (noise). Distinguishing signal from noise is a skill with many benefits. For example, in terms of distinguishing emotional signals from noise as a caregiver, those who accurately pick up on the primary emotionally signal of others (such as fear), distinguishing it from the noise produced from secondary emotions (anger, as a secondary emotion, often flows from fear), cultural delivery, and contextual distractions, have higher quality day-to-day social interactions. Those who are more prone to subtle deceptive distortions (noise), failing to attune to the priority signal at the moment, tend toward lower quality social interactions (Hess, Kafetsios, Mauersberger, Blaison, & Kessler, 2016).

The ability to recognize the signal amid noise is a natural outcome of mindfulness. Our emotions are excellent signals with objective interpretation. However, when we attach and identify with emotions, assuming they are facts, as opposed to information to consider, they act as noise that hampers our ability to accurately interpret the message we are meant to receive (signal).

Mindfulness, moving from thinking mode to sensing mode, enables us to step back from the barrage of thoughts and emotions that occupy the mind (non-attachment). With this objectivity, feelings of threat move into the background, enabling us to decipher between worthy causes to pay attention to versus passing distractions.

Desire as Signal, Obligations as Noise

“Distinguishing the signal from the noise requires both scientific knowledge and self-knowledge: the serenity to accept the things we cannot predict, the courage to predict the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference” (Silver, 2012)

When we step back from thought rumination, connecting to our senses and the moment (mindfulness), we obtain the space needed to keep thoughts and emotions in perspective. Within the space, there is a doorway,
and through this doorway is our desire, and through desire we access our essence. Practically speaking, this emancipation from attaching to passing thoughts and emotions enables us to intuitively (deep knowing) and heartfully (tuning into what resonates) distinguish between the barrage of noise we experience each day, and the important signals to which we ought to pay more attention. By letting the noise sink into the background, we can align our actions with the signal of our unique desires and values.

*Heart breathing* means imagining filtering every breath, thought, and emotion through your heart space. It is an excellent way to tune to your inner “signal”. To practice heart breathing, first drop into the inner world, settling into quietness and letting external distractions fall into the background. Connect heartfully, moving beyond the threshold of the thinking mind. This practice enables us to transcend past the limits of our thoughts and emotions. In this space, you connected to essence, our inner world and spirit. With practice, you will transcend past the veil of the ego, allowing you to see and feel your connection to others, to nature, and for many, to a higher power. From this wise and connected place, you can easily distinguish the signal from the noise. As Silver put it: “The signal is the truth. The noise is what distracts us from the truth” (Silver, 2012, p.17).

Focusing on your heart while you inhale and exhale helps cultivate loving-kindness and supports development of self-compassion. As we focus on a sense in the body, including the breath and the heart space, we strengthen our ability to connect to the inner world, to be mindful of inner sensations, and to improve concentration and clarity of mind. As we learn (through trial and error) strategies that help us feel connected to self and to a higher power (or simply higher self if preferred), we can quickly drop in and self-soothe when we need it most. There are a variety of ways to promote connection. Some prefer visualizing, or using the imagination to re-orient themselves, enabling them to view themselves and the world through a heart-centered/spiritual lens. For example, inhaling a cleansing white light in through the crown of the head and while exhaling, imagine extending love and compassion from the heart. Others find that mantras (quietly or out loud) quickly move them across the threshold. There are a variety of other techniques included in this curriculum, such as elemental breathing, the body scan, etc. Take your time trying them all, getting familiar with each one so that you can add it to your tool belt. Based on our previous life experiences, personalities and sensory preferences, the doorway to our inner worlds will vary. Having multiple tools at your disposal gives you choices, based on your unique needs and the context you find yourself in.

Once grounded in your inner world, consider:
Where do you WANT to be? This is not where you think you should be, or where you think others think you should be, but where you LONG to be.

*It is unnecessary to effort or force results; in fact, gentleness is an important quality of self-compassion, trusting that when we are ready, the answers to our questions will materialize from within us. Releasing the need to control, trusting that our inner resources are being developed as we meet ourselves wherever we are, being present to what IS, and practicing unconditional positive regard inwardly and outwardly.*

If you were unencumbered by feelings of guilt or fear and you lived the life you wanted to live, what would be different? How would that feel? How would it change your life? What would you be doing then that you aren’t doing now? What would you be allowing then that you aren’t allowing now?

What qualities of self are required to attain this desire? What are the obstacles to attaining what you desire?
What actions are necessary to navigate the obstacles?

When will you take these actions?

**The Journey Ahead**
In Part IV we came to know stress mitigation strategies, improving our ability to manage the weather before it threatens our basic human needs. We dropped into our inner world, re-connecting to our bodies and the experiences within. We are beginning to work with unresolved trauma, recognizing the need to clean and clear as we move through the curriculum. As we continue to connect, moving from the disconnected thinking mind to a deeper heartful way of knowing, we are beginning to improve our ability to distinguish the signal from the noise, enabling us to align with what resonates and to let go of unnecessary distractions. In Part V we dig deeper, attuning and strengthening sense of coherence through mindful re-orientation.
PART V: Sense of Coherence and Mindfulness: Deepening Roots through Re-orientation

In any given moment we are either in a mindless state or a mindful state. When caught up in thoughts of the future, anxiety creeps in. When replaying thoughts of the past, we are prone to discontentment. The peace we all long for is found when we attend to the present moment.

Congruence and self-compassion, discussed at length in Part IV, are about deepening our roots by improving our orientation to self. On the other hand, sense of coherence centers on improving our orientation to life (Antonovsky, 1987). Combined, congruence and sense of coherence enable us to self-actualize and thrive as our best and most authentic self.

When I first studied the concept of sense of coherence, I was struck by the profound parallels with the concept of mindfulness from Buddhism. Sense of coherence, like mindfulness, emphasises a sharpened awareness of present phenomena in a way that is clear and non-attached. Mindfulness focuses on moving from the subjective thinking mind to the objective sensing mind. From the sensing mind, we can confront our thoughts, emotions, and external stimuli with acceptance and non-attachment (releasing judgment). Sense of coherence includes the ability to objectively orient our self to the outside world, but also provides a felt sense of meaning and purpose in life (Grevenstein, Aguilar-Raab, & Bluemke, 2018). Sense of coherence and mindfulness underpin our ability to manage external stimuli, both personal and professional. When our sense of coherence is high, we are less likely to feel threatened or stressed by the events and feelings that inevitably come our way.

**Sense of Coherence and Mindfulness**

As discussed in Part I, Antonovsky’s (1987) concept sense of coherence has three components, 1) the ability to understand and predict life events, 2) a person’s belief that they have the resources to meet the demands of life events, and 3) a person can derive meaning from day-to-day activities. Those who have higher sense of coherence scores are less likely to perceive external stimuli as stressful because they know they have the resources available to manage the stimuli. As a result, those with higher sense of coherence scores are more likely to have positive mental/physical long-term health outcomes (Lindmark et al., 2011). Those who have lower sense of coherence scores are apt to experience stimuli as stressful, use substances to cope with that stress, and are at greater risk of succumbing to a variety of chronic mental and physical health ailments.

Antonovsky found that the developmental and material resources facilitate the ability to cope with stress, improve sense of coherence and that we can develop these resources with mindfulness practice and goal setting (Super, Wagemakers, Picavet, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2016). Mindfulness enables awareness and acceptance of what IS, promoting an ability to step back from stimuli, which keeps them in perspective and maximizes our ability to creatively manage them. This acceptance is a necessary component of self-compassion (unconditional positive regard directed inwardly). Furthermore, acceptance disentangles us from shame, which enables non-attachment. Non-attachment promotes an ability to make decisions and goals that bolster our internal resources (strengthening our roots), promoting resilience and congruence.

Examples of assets (internal and external) that promote sense of coherence and ultimately a greater ability to thrive are material resources, social supports, a positive childhood upbringing, and roles that bolster self-efficacy (Dames, 2018). When available, these resilience resources buffer us from stressors and can improve sense of coherence in two ways:

1. Empower us to acquire the resources needed to manage stimuli by modifying the context and/or and learning how to apply our resources to resolve the stimuli. For example, establishing supportive relationships, adapting our work context to better meet our needs, and gaining financial stability.
2. Enabling us to feel confident they we have the resources to navigate stressors, as opposed to feeling overwhelmed by them; recounting past experiences of success, mindfully using gratitude and optimism (See Part VII). For example, developing self-compassion and self-efficacy through mindfulness and goal achievement prevents difficult emotions and events from feeling threatening, bolstering our confidence to manage difficult emotions and to resolve or navigate stimuli before they become stressors.

To have a high sense of coherence, we must have an ability to frequently employ mindfulness, enabling us to objectively manage stimuli. Mindfulness is bringing attention to the present moment, moving from a thinking mode to a sensing mode. Meditation is simply sustained mindfulness. While the term mindfulness suggests that it is a form of thinking, it is the opposite. The term awareness is more accurate than mindfulness as it is not limited to the thinking mind. We can observe the thinking mind, just as we can our emotions, our sense perceptions, intuition, energetic sensing, noticing things both internal and external; it is a container for all the multifaced ways we experience life. For example, we cultivate a watchfulness or awareness of swirling thoughts, rather than cultivating more thoughts about our thoughts. By being aware, we transcend the thought cycle, empowering us to use thoughts as a tool rather than feel oppressed by them. This curriculum uses mindfulness and meditation exercises as the primary tools to recognize what is happening around and within us, to investigate thoughts and emotions via non-attachment, and to shift (re-orient) our perspective. Mindfulness provides the nutrients necessary to nourish our roots, promoting the objectivity needed to attain a high sense of coherence. Practicing mindfulness not only improves our focus, training our attention, but it also cultivates an open and accepting attitude toward life events, impacting our life orientation (Slutsky, Rahl, Lindsay, & Creswell, 2016). Our life orientation (sense of coherence) determines whether we interpret stimuli as threatening/stressful and as a result, impacts our ability to accept and manage the emotions that result. This occurs because if we are in a state of threat, we take a defensive stance (fight-flight-freeze), making it difficult to practice non-attachment when uncomfortable emotions present.

Mindfulness results from a conscious choice to operate from the sensing mode. If we do not make the choice, our untrained mind will slip into the thinking mode, fixating on thoughts of the past or the future. This mindless thought rumination is a breeding ground for anxiety and depression. When we assume our thoughts are facts, as opposed to subjective judgments, we limit our ability to be present and to see things as they 'really' are. In every moment, we are in a mindful state (sensing) or a mindless state (thinking). The average person spends 50% of their waking hours in thinking mode, ruminated on thoughts of the past or the future (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Thinking enables us to plan, remember important events, and to set goals. Sensing enables us to live, being open to what is 'actually' happening at the moment.

Our emotions offer powerful cues that tell us what mode we are in. For instance, when caught up in threatening thoughts of the future, anxiety results. Using the anxiety as a mindfulness cue transforms uncomfortable emotion into an opportunity. We may not be mindful when anxiety creeps in but may be signaled by tension in our shoulders or back or an upset stomach; these are powerful cues to interrupt the stress response. When we experience the world through our senses, we gain objectivity, an ability to step back, enabling us to stay open to what is happening at the moment; this prevents us from attaching to thoughts of the past or the future. As a result, we are more objective, creative, flexible, adaptive, and confident in our ability to manage our thoughts and to navigate challenges.

Shinzen Young (2016), a seminal mindfulness researcher and developer of Unified Mindfulness, defined ‘self’ as the sum of our mental image (inner seeing), our mental talk (inner voice), and our body (feelings). Observing these sense components creates a space between our true self and the experiences of the true self; this is non-attachment. Non-attachment is a key component of mindfulness, where we act as
an impartial observer of the coming and going of different moods/thoughts/mental states with acceptance and without judgment. Non-attached mindfulness promotes choice, shifting our orientation from subjective to objective, opening the ability to navigate obstacles without feeling threatened by them. When we attach or identify with an emotion, thought, or action, we are prone to feeling threatened by external stimuli, making them stressful, which compounds suffering and hampers our ability to thrive.

When we run into what Shinzen Young (2016) calls the Icky, Sticky, Creepy- Doesn’t Really Hurt, but I Can’t Stand it Feeling we often think we are doing something wrong. The more we relax into meditation (sustained mindfulness) the more intense these feelings can be. If misunderstood, these feelings will make us avoid mindfulness and meditation at all costs, which many of us do by distracting ourselves throughout the day with external stimuli. However, having these feelings emerge is actually a sign we are doing something right! We are creating a safe space, an inner sanctuary ready to heal past wounds that would otherwise continue to haunt us from the shadows. The more we resist emotional pain the greater our suffering will be.

\[ Suffering = Pain \times Resistance \] (Young, 2016)

We can dissolve resistance by (1) accepting that suffering is a part of being human, (2) accepting that emotions are a doorway to healing, (3) knowing that they will dissipate in time, and (4) cultivating a sense of gratitude for the healing opportunity they represent.

Judging the Judge. Regarding judgment, as you observe your thoughts, notice how they gravitate to judgments. Our prejudices, which are subjective, limit our ability to give people the benefit of the doubt and to be open to seeing things as they are. Judging is a NORMAL part of being human and a necessary component of making critical decisions. It is not helpful to judge ourselves for being judgmental, doing so results in unnecessary shame. By switching into sensing mode, engaging mindfulness, we can take a step back from our initial judgments. From this place of non-attachment, we cultivate a sense of curiosity about our pre-judgmental/prejudicial thoughts, taking stalk of the uniqueness of the situation. Re-orienting in this way, puts thoughts and emotions in perspective, as information to consider rather than as facts; from this grounded place we can act rather than being held captive by our reactions.

Gravitating to activities and substances to cope. Awareness and management of emotional projections enables us to challenge the self-destructive programming that deters us from going inside to self-sooth. To illustrate this deterrence, let’s say you have a friend who criticizes you when you are most vulnerable. They chastise whenever you make a mistake and dismiss your opinions and emotions. Would you desire to go to them the next time you are suffering, or would you do everything possible to avoid crossing paths with them when you feel vulnerable? As long as the critical cast of characters continues to dominate our inner world, we will avoid it at all costs. As a result, we will turn to substances and activities to sooth, which perpetuates addictive tendencies.

The Science of Mindfulness
The Science of Mindfulness is not just a way to gain objectivity, it has immediate effects on the parts of the brain that act as a buffer against anxiety, depression, cognitive decline associated with aging, and the experience of pain (Laneri, Schuster, Dietsche, Jansen, Ott, & Sommer, 2016; Yang, Barros-Loscertales, Pinazo, Ventura-Campos, Borchardt, Bustamante, Juan-Carios, Rodriguez-Pujadas, et al., 2016). By strengthening neural connections, research shows that our ability to control emotions improves, our tendencies to react out of fear diminishes, and because it improves the volume of our brains grey matter, we become more self-aware and introspective (Schwartz & Gladding, 2011; Vestergaard-Poulsen, Van Beek, Skewes, Bjarkam, Stubberup, Bertelsen, & Roepstorff, 2009).
Cultivating mindfulness through loving-kindness practices regulates the neural circuitry of emotion. Those who develop meditation and loving-kindness skills activate the amygdala and the temporal lobe, which promotes emotional regulation and empathy (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). In a nutshell, sustaining loving-kindness practices improves our brain’s grey matter, impacting the area responsible for empathetic engagement, buffering us from anxiety, and improving our mood regulation (Leung, Chan, Yin, Lee, So, & Lee, 2013).

Changes in the brain can occur after just one session of mindfulness and with ongoing practice it creates lasting changes in gray matter in the hippocampus and a decrease in brain cell volume in the amygdala (Kral, Schuyler, Mumford, Rosenkranz, Lutz, & Davidson, 2018; Hölzel, Carmody, Vangel, Congleton, Yerramsetti, Gard & Lazar, 2011). These changes translate into lower stress/cortisol levels, improved memory, and an improved ability to focus.

Mindful breathing also has powerful physiological effects. For instance, working with the breath increases performance, reduces stress reduction, improves emotional management, and has a host of short and long-term health benefits (Rozman, Whitaker, & Beckman, 1996; Sarabia-Cobo, 2015). By focusing the attention in the chest, imagining the breath moving in and out of the heart, and then slowing down the rate and increasing the depth of the breath, we shift into a more coherent state. As a result, it positively impacts vagal activity and heart rhythm (McCraty, Atkinson, Tomasino, & Bradley, 2009).

“Experience is not always tethered to the here and now; instead, it ebbs and flows between mental contents from both intrinsic and extrinsic sources” (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

The flipside of mindfulness is mindlessness, or mind wandering. According to research, the typical person spends nearly half of their waking hours thinking about anything but the present moment (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Mind wandering is not ‘bad,’ and in fact, it is an important part of how we process and digest information, often the breeding ground for creative insights, and future planning efforts. When done with intention, we can minimize the downsides of mind wandering (fruitless rumination on past events or future worries) and maximize the benefits. While many of us could use rebalancing, gaining more moments of mindfulness, we need not berate ourselves for letting our minds wander. With practice and time, we can sustain mindfulness for longer periods of time. When our minds wander, it is an excellent opportunity to provide grace and self-compassion, redirecting our focus back to the moment.

**Mind over Body: The Healing Power of Mindfulness**

Studies continue to emerge, building on the idea that our minds have a powerful impact on our health. Sense of coherence, which is our orientation to the world, including our confidence to navigate challenges like physical illness have a significant impact on whether we succumb to dis-ease. For example, in a dissertation study of 50 healers and physicians from 11 countries and 20 cancer survivors who went into spontaneous remission (without medical treatment), there was a strong mind-body connection that facilitated their remission. Those who went into spontaneous remission focussed on improving their diet, taking herbal/vitamin supplements and the following four mindful focusses: 1) Spiritual connection, 2) Body/Intuition Connection, 3) Cultivating an awareness of repressed emotions and then working to release them, 4) Cultivating joy (Turner, 2010). Though this study was published in 2010, more studies have built off it. A study in 2017 found that using mindful practices to reduce stress improved the early stages of wound healing (Meesters, Den Bosch-Meevissen, Yvo, Weijzen, Buurman, Losen, Schepers, Thissen, Monique, Alberts, Hugo, Schalkwijk, & Peters, 2017). These studies support the suggestion that high sense of coherence (including mindfulness) improves our ability to manage stress, optimistically re-orient our thoughts and emotions, and as a result, prevent dis-ease and promote healing.
Training the Brain to be Mindful

There are two general mediation styles, differentiated by how we direct our attention. One occurs when we orient ourselves as the impartial third-party observer to thoughts and sensations as they arise and dissipate. The other focuses the attention on specific objects and activities such as the breath or mantras (short repeated words or phrases). Try a variety of practices and go with what resonates for you. What you desire and what is workable in the moment will change depending on your environment, your state of mind, and your time allowances. For instance, some options include:

- Focusing on their breath, which can vary from belly breathing, heart breathing, or observing the breath as it moves in the body.
- Short repeated phrases/mantras (out loud or quietly, with or without movement).
- Focusing on the internal world, observing the passing thoughts and feelings as they rise and fall.
- Focusing on the external world, experiencing the world through one (or more) of the senses.
- Attending to a gratitude practice, forgiveness practice, loving-kindness practices, etc.
- Following a guided meditation.

Rather than using mindfulness to stop the mind, which would be a frustrating effort, use it instead as a tool to calm the mind. Concentrated effort can be difficult at first, but with practice, the brain develops the ability to easily transition to the sensing mode and will sustain focus for longer periods of time. Each time you practice mindfulness you are investing in your brain development. When the mind wonders, remind yourself that it is a normal part of the training process; take comfort that by redirecting your focus, you are on the right track! Practicing mindfulness is not only a way to develop concentration but also an important way to develop patience and self-compassion.

One of the simplest ways to calm the mind is to focus on the breath. Cultivating curiosity about the relationship between the breath and our physiology and emotions; noticing the details of each breath, the speed, the depth, and the rhythm of the inspiration ending and the expiration beginning. Joseph Emet (2012) described it as follows:

*When we are daydreaming, the breath follows the rhythm of our thoughts. That rhythm can be irregular, because we are going from thought to thought, from one thing to another. As we continue to follow the breath instead of our thoughts, the breath gets into a steady, regular rhythm.*

*Usually we follow our thoughts without any attention to the breath. Here, we reverse that — we follow our breath. At the beginning, we treat our thoughts a little bit like the way we treat the radio in the background. As we do other things, we are aware that the radio is playing, but we do not follow it actively. For example, when the announcer says, “Go and buy that car right now, because it is so amazing,” we do not drop everything and rush out to buy it. We have learned to take an attitude of sophisticated detachment with regard to the radio. Now we cultivate the same detached attitude toward our thoughts.*

**Attuning Practice: Observing the Breath**

Observing our breath is a simple form of mindfulness, accessible anywhere, for any length of time. How we breathe impacts the activation of our sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (mitigating stress and promoting relaxation). There is not a ‘right’ way to observe your breath, do what feels most natural to you. To begin, most people gravitate toward nose breathing as it facilitates relaxation and mouth breathing dries out the mucous membranes. Here are a few more tips:
• Notice the sensation and temperature of the air passing by our nostrils,
• Feel it move down into the chest,
• Feel the belly rise to make room for the fresh air,
• Feel the shifting of clothing as the belly rises and falls.
• Feel the breath transition: notice the moment the inspiration ends, and the expiration begins.

You may notice how the breath follows a regular rhythm, like Emit (2012) describes as that of the waves on the beach:

Like the waves, the breath comes from somewhere we don’t know. Then it goes inside, and gets lost, like the waves that get absorbed into the sand. Some of the water gets returned back to the ocean, but it is not exactly the same. Now it has cleaned the beach and is carrying back some debris and also the warmth of the sand with it. The breath has also just cleaned the body, and the out breath is warm and full of carbon dioxide. You can let yourself be guided by this mental imagery. Involve all your senses and now bask in the sunshine on that beach for a few minutes and enjoy the whish of the waves.

... What is happening in the mind at this point is also a little bit like the difference between city driving and long-distance driving. In city driving, there is much stopping and starting and emotions like impatience or irritation. When you settle into long-distance driving, all those calm down. The rhythm changes.

Making and Breaking Habits/Rituals

Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going (Ryun)

Mindfulness is a way of being, an ongoing practice of waking up to what is actually happening in any given moment. We become mindful by transitioning from a thinking mode to a sensing mode. For instance, ruminating on thoughts of the past (where discontentment is born) or future (where anxiety is born) is done in thinking mode. Focusing on what is happening in the moment through our senses (sounds we hear, sights we see, feelings we feel, etc.) is done from our sensory mode. One is fixated on thoughts and the other is fixated on what is happening inside and around us. Neither is good or bad, and in fact, they are both necessary for us to process and digest information.

For mindfulness to be effective, we must develop habits that act as cues to trigger a transition from thinking to sensing. Mindfulness efforts are cumulative. Every mindful moment is an investment toward improving our sense of coherence (how we orient ourselves in the external world) and our congruence (how we orient ourselves in the inner world).

We can all relate to the frustration that accompanies fruitless attempts to form and break habits. Habits are those repetitive behaviors that stem from subconscious thought processes that are cued by internal and/or external stimuli. Once a behavior moves from a conscious effort to an automatic response to a stimulus, it frees up our mental resources for other tasks. Unfortunately, habits persist even after our conscious motivation has dissipated, which is why even though we may know a habit is no longer serving our best interests, they are often difficult to change.
Habits intertwine with tendencies to use substances and activities to cope with or avoid suffering. Suffering occurs when a real or imagined threat to our basic human needs arises. While many of us avoid wearing labels such as ‘addiction’ and ‘substance-use,’ which are complex and cloaked in shame, we all have habits and can relate to the power they can wield. Focusing on strategies to break habits we aren’t proud of often ends in failure and fuels shame, further perpetuating self-destructive thoughts/sensations and incongruence. By focusing on forming habits that develop deeper roots, moving towards congruence, we improve our ability to make objective choices that serve our highest interests. Congruence improves our ability to act in ways that nourish our roots, as opposed to feeling trapped in a subconscious impulse loop. Old ways of being that no longer align with our values lose their grip and fall away.

While the amount of effort and the time it takes to form habits depends on many factors, on average, it takes 66 days to make a behavior automatic (Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts, & Wardle, 2010). In other words, habit forming involves repeating the behavior in the same context each day for over 66 days for it to become effortless and automatic (Gardner, Lally, Wardle, 2012).

Applying basic principles (Fitts & Posner, 1967) to mindfulness habits, we must effort in the beginning, repeating the practice of operating from a sensing mode over and over until it becomes familiar. We notice our mind wandering and make corrections as needed. With a newfound awareness of tensions, we can soften them and often let them go. Taking on the impartial observer role, we notice the difference between letting things be and trying to control them. It becomes easier as the benefits overshadow the effort; with more repetition it becomes automatic; we engage in the activity without having to enforce it.

**Attuning Practice: Creating a Habit/Ritual**

*The law of harvest is to reap more than you sow. Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny. – James Allen*

Most people will overestimate accomplishments in the short term and underestimate what they can accomplish in three to five years. With making a goal, think long-term, it’s ok to dream big! With creating a habit, think small and simple; each small step moves toward the larger goal.

1. **GOAL:** Deciding on a goal you desire (e.g. ‘I want to be more present’)

2. **PLAN:** Choose a simple daily action that moves you closer to your goal. (e.g. ‘I will ground myself by dropping in/checking in with my inner self multiple times a day’)

3. **SPECIFICS:** When and where exactly will you do this chosen action each day? (‘Every time I enter my home or office, I will drop in by observe 3 cycles of my breathing before I begin a task’)

If helpful, keep a record to motivate and remind you until the behavior becomes automatic. Remember, our focus is on progress, not perfection. If you make a mistake, do not fear or shame yourself, just get back on track, and keep investing in the repetitions. Overtime, the repetitions will get easier and you will be far less
likely to forget. If you make a mistake, practice self-compassion by reminding yourself that forming habits is difficult for everybody, especially in the beginning. If you continue to forget, rather than using the action as a reason to berate yourself, instead, reassess your goal, is it one you desire, or did you set the goal because you felt you ‘should’? If the goal does not align with our desires, we are far less likely to invest ourselves in the process of achieving it. Is your plan simple? In order to consistently effort to complete an action each day, it must be simple. Start small! Moving toward your goal often happens with small, sustainable steps. With each successful habit, confidence/self-efficacy (a core component of sense of coherence) grows and as you move closer to your goal.

**Attuning Practice: Breaking Habits with Mindfulness**

Making a habit requires enough repetition to transition from conscious effort to conscious ease to subconscious automaticity. Breaking a habit is the reverse of the process of forming one. Rather than working toward automaticity, we are working toward consciousness by bringing mindfulness back to the action; this then provides an opportunity to interrupt the habit. Noticing something new about a situation or activity cultivates curiosity, deepening mindfulness and as a result, new neural pathways evolve.

Choose an activity you do on autopilot and challenge yourself to bring a renewed sense of mindfulness, looking for something new, cultivating curiosity, and bringing your focus back to the activity each time the mind wanders. As an example, our eating habits are a great way to practice a mindful habit, bringing more consciousness back to an action that often becomes automatic. It is common for us to put our minds on autopilot as we eat, focusing on a screen, or getting lost in thoughts of the past or the future.

**A Mindful Meal.** In a review of five weight loss studies in the United States, a focus on mindful eating improved one’s felt awareness and connection to their body, to be more in tune with hunger and satiety cues, to improve self-compassion, decrease cravings and decrease tendency to use food as a coping mechanism (Dunn, Haubenreiser, Johnson, Nordby, Aggarwal, Myer, & Thomas, 2018). Another study involving 59,000 participants with Type II diabetes found that those that slowed their rate of eating down we 42% less obese than those who continued to eat fast (Hurst & Fukuda, 2018).

So often we eat in autopilot mode, mindlessly consuming food without paying much attention to the sensation of eating and the bodies cues. As we bring mindfulness to the experience, we gain trust in the body’s cues, listening to our desires. Mindfulness enables us to notice what is new and to pick up on the subtle cues such as a desire to push our plate away or noticing that what we are eating no longer has much flavor. Remember, mindfulness is a practice that takes time to develop. Your ability to develop the habit will take time, persistence, and self-compassion. When you slip up, mindlessly eating until you are uncomfortably full or forgetting to pay attention to the what and how of eating, flex your self-compassionate muscles, and use the experience as a learning opportunity. Each step backward or forward is an investment in our lifelong journey of learning.

 теперь, try eating a meal with a degree of ceremony:

1. Choose a comfortable spot, ideally clean and clutter and distraction free.
2. Look for food that sounds good for your palate, not because it is a rational choice or because you ‘should’ eat (because it is healthy, budget friendly, easy, etc.); choose something you desire.
3. Plate your food in such a way that it looks appetizing to you. Is it colorful? Interesting?
4. Plan meal times you can relax into, rather than waiting until you are overly hungry or when you only have a few minutes to eat.
5. Infuse a loving-kindness practice into your eating routine (Chozen Bays, 2009), perhaps not everytime, but as a regular practice. For instance, using breathing to settle you, silently repeat phrases such as, “may my body be at ease (as you immerse in feelings of ease), may my body be
happy (smiling slightly as you repeat the phrase), “may I be free of anxiety about eating.” Play with phrases that resonate with you and if time allows, you can then expand these loving-kindness phrases to others (“may others with anxiety about eating be at ease” …etc.).

6. Slow your eating down. To slow down you might try setting your fork or spoon down between bites or intentionally taking a few breaths between each bite and chewing the food slowly and thoroughly before you swallow.

7. With a sense of curiosity, engage all of your senses. Notice the smell, the flavors, and the texture.

8. Cultivate gratitude by immersing in the pleasure you are experiencing, including your emotional state and your degree of hunger and satiety. Reflect on how it is nourishing your body.

9. Connect to your desire part way through: do you want more or has the flavor waned? Are you still enjoying the experience or are you losing interest?

The Raisin Exercise. This exercise by UC Berkeley’s ‘Greater Good in Action’ requires five minutes, a raisin (or something similar) and an open mind.

- **Holding** – take a raisin and hold it between your finger and your thumb
- **Seeing** – take the time to really focus on the raisin and give it your full attention. Examine the unique texture and colour; where the light shines, the darker hollows, the folds and ridges.
- **Touching** – close your eyes and focus on the wrinkled texture of the raisin, and how it feels in your hand.
- **Smelling** – hold the raisin up to your nose and smell the raisin; notice any effect that this has on your stomach and mouth.
- **Placing** – gently place the raisin in your mouth and leave it there without chewing. Focus on the sensation of what it feels like in your mouth.
- **Tasting** – very slowly and consciously, chew the raisin once or twice. Fully experience the waves of taste emanating from the raisin, how these change over time and changes to the raisin itself in shape.
- **Swallowing** – see if you can detect when you first have the intention to swallow, and then consciously swallow the raisin
- **Following** – sense how your body is feeling as a whole after eating the raisin

Remember, working with habits, creating new rituals, requires patience, and an ability to stay open with a self-compassionate and non-judgmental approach. It takes time and slip-ups are an expected part of the process. Making and breaking habits is a messy process, characterized by fits and starts. If we fixate on perfection, we will find ourselves attached to black and white thinking, which fuels incongruence, shame, and a low sense of coherence; getting stuck in this rabbit hole dampens our confidence and momentum.

Accept slip ups, use them as opportunities to practice self-compassion and optimistic re-orientation. The key to success is keeping at it and focusing on progress.

“Ritual is to the soul what food is to the physical body.” (Some, 2009)
The Why and How of Meditation Practice

“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor” (Thich Nhat Hanh).

Meditation practice is a vehicle toward congruence. It is through meditation that we come to know the unconscious parts of ourselves, those parts that have not yet emerged from the shadow (Jung, 1970). The shadow, largely unconscious or it would not be in the shadow, shows itself through our projections and these projections are often present during times of sustained mindfulness (meditation). At some point in our lives these ‘real’ parts of ourselves were shunned to the shadows to ensure that we gained approval from others (assimilation/homogenization). In addition to realizing wholeness, meditation improves our awareness of the connection between though rumination and emotional states (enabling us to interrupt self-destructive thoughts) and improves our concentration and thought clarity (Jung, 1970).

A common way to meditate is to focus on our observations, breeding awareness and working to step back from our judgements (non-attachment) of the inner experience. Meditation in this way improves our ability to be non-judgmental, less reactive, and more observant. In terms of practicalities, as much as we may prefer to lump our meditation time into a long sitting or two a week, the frequency of our practice is more important that the duration (Soler, Cebolla, Feliu-Soler, Demarzo, Pascual, Baños, & García, 2014; Cebolla, Campos, Galiana, Oliver, Tomás, Feliu-Soler, & Baños, 2017)

There are three overarching categories of meditation, which you can choose between based on your intention:

1. Focused Attention – focusing attention cultivates concentration on a singular event. You may focus on your breath, or a sensory experience such as objects you see or sounds you hear. This practice works to minimize the impact of distractions, reducing mind wandering by bringing the attention to a singular event (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson, 2015). This form of meditation trains your attention, improving focus, concentration, and memory

2. Open Monitoring - during OM, you expand your attention, being open to whatever experience arises (internally or externally), refraining from labeling, over-identifying, and judging (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson, 2015).

3. Compassion Meditation – often incorporates open monitoring and focused attention, with a focus on extending loving-kindness to others. As a result, these practices impact your relationships and ability to resolve conflict, which are socially beneficial behaviors (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010).

Achieving mindfulness intentions (focusing, observing, compassion) can occur through many practices. While it is good to gain familiarity with certain practices before jumping to the next, before you decide that meditation is not for you, be sure you try a variety. If one causes great effort, try another; find one that resonates with you. The list below illustrates the overarching categories, depending on your needs and goals. Each of these is included in this curriculum in varying forms:

Relaxation meditation (body scan, passive observation of the breath, yoga)
- Progressive relaxation (body scan)
- Releasing tension by focusing on the breath and letting emotions and tensions fall into the background
- Active muscle relaxation (and release of tension) via stretching and yoga

Visualization to improve performance (imagery meditation)
• Improving performance for a future task (athletics, public speaking, etc.)
• Creative visualization
Connection to self and others (loving-kindness practices, yoga, body scan)
• Working through areas of resentment and conflict
• Improving the ability to be compassionate to self and others
• Connecting mind, spirit and body, including gratitude for what IS
Transcendental Meditation (intuitive meditation, entering altered mind states)
• Use of mantras and breathing exercises to access our intuitive self, deeper brain waves; resulting in alchemical healing.
Re-programming and Shadow work (working through unresolved trauma, noticing and re-parenting/re-programming old and incongruent thought patterns)
• Forgiveness practices re-orient us, releasing us from the role of the victim and empowering us as survivors.
• Using open monitoring with non-attachment, witness projections from past trauma/unresolved events, and work to accept every emotion that springs up, welcome them knowing this is part of the healing process. Practice acceptance, refraining from identifying, labeling, or judging them as good or bad. Successful re-programming/re-parenting requires self-compassion and non-attachment (enabling unconditional positive regard for self) – soothing ourselves like we would a small child or close friend.

*We do not meditate to control our thoughts. We meditate to cultivate non-attachment to our thoughts so they do not control us.*

As a past neuroscience professor with over 40 years of Buddhist mediation experience, in the book the mind Illuminated: A complete meditation guide integrating Buddhist Wisdom and Science, Dr. John Yates (2015) described 10 stages and four milestones as one develops their mindfulness abilities.

The Novice Meditator

**Stage One:** Establishing a Practice

**Stage Two:** Interrupted Attention and Overcoming Mind-Wandering

**Stage Three:** Extended Attention and Overcoming Forgetting

**Milestone One:** Continuous Attention to the Meditation Object

The Skilled Meditator

**Stage Four:** Continuous Attention and Overcoming Gross Distraction and Strong Dullness

**Stage Five:** Overcoming Subtle Dullness and Increasing Mindfulness

**Stage Six:** Subduing Subtle Distraction

**Milestone Two:** Sustained Exclusive Focus of Attention

The Transition

**Stage Seven:** Exclusive Attention and Unifying the Mind
Milestone Three: Effortless Stability of Attention

The Adept Meditator

Stage Eight: Mental Pliancy and Pacifying the Senses
Stage Nine: Mental and Physical Pliancy and Calming the Intensity of Meditative Joy
Stage Ten: Tranquility and Equanimity


Technology: Supporting Mindfulness

While technology can distract us from connecting to our inner selves, it can also remind us to be mindful. A variety of apps exist to enable guided meditations and to provide check-in reminders throughout the day. You can even set reminders on your phone, perhaps asking yourself, “in this moment, are you mindful or mindless?” Mindfulness is a choice and having environmental cues that promote connection to the moment can be helpful in the process of building habits of mindfulness.

Mindfulness Tools: Neurofeedback and Binaural Beats

Binaural beats are an auditory tool that uses two different beat/tone frequencies in each ear. As a result, it can alter brainwaves, enabling people to enter specific brainwave states. For instance, depending on the different beat combinations, you could use binaural beats to improve cognitive flexibility and focus (Fischer, Colzato, Hommel, Borg, & Sellaro, 2016), to reduce anxiety (Chaieb, Wilpert, Hoppe, Axmacher, & Fell, 2017), or to assist in the ability to enter relaxed/meditative states (Jirakittayakorn & Wongsawat, 2017). In addition, long-term altering of the brain network has similar effects of meditation (Seifi Ala, Ahmadi-Pajouh, & Nasrabadi, 2018).

Neurofeedback tools, such as electroencephalogram (EEG) headbands provide instant feedback on the electrical activity of the brain. The theory behind using neurofeedback, similar to biofeedback, is that by connecting our brain states to specific activities and feeling states, we are more likely to enter our desired states quickly and confidently. Research shows that neurofeedback has significant positive effects on cognitive performance by promoting an ability to focus and concentrate, entering mindful states at will (Gruzelier, 2014). Using neurofeedback tools, such as EEG headbands, has significant potential to augment mindfulness-related capacities (Navarro Gil, Escolano Marco, Montero-Marín, Mínguez Zafra, Shonin, & García Campayo, 2018).

Attuning Practice: Awareness through Mindfulness

When we mindfully reflect (as opposed to mindless rumination), we develop awareness and acceptance of our unique belief systems, values, resources and/or barriers that impact the ability to practice self-compassion and engage in thriving; therefore, self-awareness is an outcome of mindfulness. Conversely, focusing on the future and the past prevents us from minding the moment and often provokes feelings of anxiety and discontentment. Re-establishing mindfulness enables us to re-orient ourselves to the moment, taking a step back as the impartial observer, and letting our thoughts and emotions fall into the background.

Take your intention inside of yourself, to the place where you see, hear, and feel internally (letting external stimuli fall into the background). Using your natural breath, silently breathe the words “right here, right now” in and out. You can also apply mindfulness to your activities, finding a rhythm with each step,
or in the case of passive activity, sitting mindfully. Repeat the practice and notice any changes that occur with your sense of mindfulness, and the feelings that result.

Now, with eyes closed, focus on your inhalation for a few cycles. Take notice of how you feel inside. Now, focus on the expiration for a few cycles. Take notice of how you feel inside. Do you notice a difference between the two?

From this place of inner focus and awareness, practice investigating how different environments affect your biology. For instance, when you are in loud and busy environments, do you notice any physical and/or emotional changes? How about in nature? Can you practice focusing on the sensation/stimuli, observing with a sense of curiosity, reminding yourself that emotions and perceptions/thoughts are only messengers to consider, not facts and not threats. Doing this enables you to step back from initial judgements and our tendencies to label. Let them come and go, being careful to not attach or ruminate.

Doing this (or an adapted version that works best for you) as you go about your daily activities promotes an ability to exercise objectivity and non-attachment, which buffers us from stress and improves our ability to creatively navigate challenges.

*Focusing on the inspiration tends to promote an ability to sink into self for deep inner listening. Focusing on the expiration tends to promote connection to others, relaxation, and emotional discharge.*

**Strengthening Practice: Mindfulness in a Pinch**

When we are on the move, it can be difficult to find a time and place to drop in for any extended periods. There are times we find ourselves overwhelmed with our thoughts, perhaps caught in a cycle of thought/emotional rumination that is difficult to break out of. While bringing our focus to the breath is often effective, when emotions are strong, we may need a few other strategies to shift us, enabling the strong emotions to fall into the background (notice, we are not resisting them).

Some quick ways to re-establish mindfulness is to:

- Bring your focus into your body by placing a flat palm of your hand on the top of your head. Focus on the feeling of gentle pressure, bringing yourself fully into your body, into the present moment.
- Bring your focus to the bottoms of your feet. Move your toes around in your shoes to feel the earth beneath you. You can go one step further and imagine your feet growing roots into the earth, deeply grounding you.
- If intense emotions emerge, place a hand(s) on your heart or your belly, whichever feels comforting; as you do, subtly smile, connecting to the joy of your heart.
- If emotions are too intense, they cause an enduring physical/cortisol response. To interrupt the chronic triggering of the systemic nervous system (resulting in the release of cortisol), refer to the de-stressing tools in Part IV. Getting the cortisol down is imperative to our willingness to be present. If cortisol levels remain high, we are far more likely to use substances/external remedies to distract ourselves from internal discomfort.

The acronym R.A.I.N is helpful to anchor you as uncomfortable emotions/sensations present (Brach, 2013):

- **R** – Recognize what is happening
- **A** – Allow life to be as it is
- **I** – Investigate with gentleness
- **N** – Non-attachment: notice the shift in your sense of your own being (identity) and rest in natural awareness + **Nourish with self-compassion**
The RAIN of Self-Compassion becomes a natural part of your mindfulness routine. Adding the cue to practice self-compassion to our sensing (mindfulness) practices is self-soothing and promotes congruence. When you complete the practice, take a few moments to be still, reflect on the helpfulness of the practice, pay attention to subtle shifts. Taking notice deepens and integrates the changes that occur.

After you practice, sit for a moment. Choose a word or phrase that describes how you feel. Taking notice after each practice will help you decipher what tools/practices resonate with you. Those that resonate will promote connection and the ability to rest in the inner world. Hold the tool lightly, as in time, another tool may call you. When you need it most, the right practice will call. Your job is to take notice when it whispers, answer the call, and trust the process as you take on a new practice. Building awareness and focusing on the benefits of these mindfulness and medication practices will remind and motivate you to pull the most helpful practice out of your tool belt when you need them most!

**Strengthening Practice: Improving Concentration with Breath Counting**

Breath counting is an excellent way to flex and track the growth of our concentration muscles and to practice self-compassion.

Begin by finding a comfortable position, free of distraction, that enables you to focus on your breath. Observe your breath, releasing the urge to control it. Count each exhalation until you have completed ten breaths. Once complete start again at one. This exercise requires concentration. When you catch your mind wandering start at one again; even if your mind wanders for a brief moment, start back at one again. You can think of it like a game, challenging yourself to stay focused. Remember, it takes practice to build concentration. Mind wandering is a normal part of the practice. Each time it happens, bring your attention back to your breath. As you gain concentration, frequently making it to ten, switch it up and start counting backwards from ten.

*Practice self-compassion by reminding yourself that the journey forward is about progress, not perfection.*

**Strengthening Practice: Improving Restraint by Working with Discomfort**

When we are still for a period of time, we experience a variety of thoughts and sensations that tug at our attention. These range from physical discomforts, itches, restlessness, and boredom, to tasks and insights that compete for attention.

When sensations and thoughts arise, knocking on the door of your consciousness, try taking a step back from them, perhaps breathing into whatever the sensation or thought may be. Creating a space by stepping back from the stimulus enables you to objectively investigate the distraction and prevents you from reacting. Practicing restraint as a mindfulness practice improves our ability to exercise the same principles in our daily activities. Noting stimuli that tug at our attention and that trigger uncomfortable emotions before we react to them gives us the space we need to critically think and to keep events in perspective; preventing a stimulus from becoming a stressor.

**Attuning Practice: The Pause Practice**

Taking pause has become a widely adopted strategy to practice as a group and/or individually across many academic and healthcare facilities. It is an excellent example of a mindfulness/presence practice that is meeting a need as it gains traction within our healthcare culture. The practice provided here is adapted (Demers & Roper, 2018) for use in team huddles, before administrative meetings, and among individual providers as they transition between tasks and breaks. If completed in full, this practice takes about five
minutes. As noted above in the discussion about creating effortless habits, the more the repetitions, the more we can quickly we are able to “drop in.”

**Posture:** relaxed, aligned, feet on ground. Eyes closed, if helpful to focus inwardly.

Three parts or movements to the pause:
1) Settling or grounding
2) Expanding awareness
3) Generating love and compassion

**First part: settling**
Become aware of your breathing. Follow your breath like watching waves on the ocean – rolling in…and out. Follow your breath as closely as possible, so that your mind aligns with your body. Notice and allow a greater sense of inner quiet, and stillness. Breathe more deeply to relax further; this settles our heart and nervous system. Imagine now drawing your breath down to your feet. Feel your feet on the ground, and the stability of that. You might imagine yourself as a tree growing roots into the earth.

**Second part: expanding awareness**
Listen deeply for what else you are aware of internally, in this moment. Notice sensations in your body…notice how you’re feeling emotionally…notice the thoughts that come and go. Now notice what you’re aware of externally [e.g. sounds inside and outside the room, light, temperature]. As you scan your field of awareness, touch each thing that comes to you lightly, and then let it go, and continue to scan. Notice how vast your field of awareness is.

**Third part: generating love and compassion**
Now draw your attention back inward, to your heart – your physical, emotional and spiritual center. Notice the feeling of warmth and energy there [you may want to place your hand on your heart]. Breathe into your heart, and as you exhale fill your body with love and compassion. As you breathe in again and exhale, extend love and compassion outward, towards each other, and to fill the room. Breathe in again, and exhale to extend love and compassion throughout the hospital (or wherever you are)…and beyond.

**Completing**
Gently bring your awareness back into the room, to your body and the feeling of your feet on the ground. When you’re ready open your eyes.

**Benefits:**
- to nurture and protect our health: settle nervous system / relieve stress;
- allow space for processing our experience (vs. buildup of unprocessed / repressed experience);
- to refresh ourselves;
- to cultivate resilience;
- antidote to common tendency to be dissociated, fragmented, in our heads, disconnected, holding our breath, etc. as a way of coping with chronic stress, exposure to trauma / suffering, feeling unsafe or unsupported;
- to cultivate mindfulness and connection: bring more of who we are to our work and relationships, to draw on our broader capacities, such emotional intelligence and intuition;
• to tune into what is happening in an expanded field of awareness. To be able to act from a grounded, heart-centered place.

Attuning Practice: Imagination/Orientation Defines Experience

Imagination, the power to form an image of something, impacts our emotional states and enables us to reprogram old thought patterns that are no longer serving us. To illustrate the emotional impact, notice what happens as we imagine different colors.

Drop into self via breathing through your heart or your belly, whichever your preference.
Now, imagine yourself filled with the color red, how does that feel?
Now, imagine yourself filled with the color blue, how does that feel?
Now, imagine yourself filled with the color green, how does that feel?
Now, imagine yourself filled with the color yellow, how does that feel?

This activity shows the power of our thoughts. The images we focus on, our imagination, impact our emotions. Being mindful when an emotion bubbles up, noting the thoughts and images at its roots. Stepping back, cultivating curiosity (non-attachment), enables us to investigate subconscious thought patterns. From here, we can interrupt negative thought patterns.

Practice: The power of a smile

“Breathing in, I calm body and mind. Breathing out, I smile. Dwelling in the present moment I know this is the only moment” (Thich Nhat Hanh).

Our disposition has similar effects to imagery. For instance, studies show that a subtle smile improves mood and when developed into a habit, it has long-term social, mental, and physical health benefits (Lin, Hu, & Gong, 2015; Johnston, Miles, & Macrae, 2010; Tuck, Adams, Pressman, & Consedine, 2017).

Observe how your biology and resulting emotions respond when you smile during meditation. Taking the exercise a step further, try smiling as often as you can (keeping it subtle) throughout the day, observing the impact it has on you and how others respond to you. Use mindfulness to turn this practice into a habit and reap the long-term benefits.

Additional Mindfulness/Meditation Practices
A meditation practice to calm the Mind (excerpt from Buddha’s Book of Sleep by Joseph Emet, 2012).

Read slowly, with a short pause between instructions:

The past has already gone and the future is yet to come.
I am concentrating on being peaceful, happy, and free in this present moment.
Now I’m concentrating on being aware of each breath.
My attention on the breath is continuous.
I follow the breath as it begins, and my abdomen starts to expand.
I continue to pay attention as my abdomen rises and falls with each breath, like a child going high and low on a swing. Like a swing, my breath slows down at each end. I follow it all the way as it slows down, and starts again.

I embrace my breath with all my care and attention, like a mother holds her baby. I do not drop the baby. Thoughts stay in the background.

I enjoy the rhythmic rise and fall of my abdomen; I enjoy staying in the here and the now. I have stopped running forward and backward.

My mind keeps producing thoughts; that is its nature. I do not follow the thoughts. I concentrate on my breath.

I’m comfortable and at ease. With each breath, I let go of tension somewhere in my body and mind.

I’m aware that thoughts can bring tension to my face. With each breath, I relax my face muscles and smile.

There are sensations in my body, I accept them. I am aware of my posture. I am aware of the rush of air around my nostrils as I breathe in.

If there are sounds, I do not react to them. I just notice them and let them go. I continue to enjoy my breathing peacefully.

A river of feelings and thoughts is flowing, but I am not drowning in it. The concentration on the breath is like the anchor that prevents the boat from drifting. Focusing on my breath keeps me from getting lost in thought. I notice sounds and skin sensations without reacting to them. I smile at disturbances such as memories, little itches, and noises. Smiling relaxes me. I feel content.

With each breath I arrive in the here and the now—I’m sitting upright, breathing comfortably.

My mind is peaceful, my body free of tension. I am calm and rested. I feel free. I feel at home.

**Mantra of Identity**
Dr. Jean Houston, a well-known author and lecturer, created the Mantra of Identity (1992), stating “on the
physical plane, where is perfection, it is everywhere. It is perfect. Where is perfection on the plane of feeling? You are loved. Where is perfection in the realm of the mind? All is clear. Where is perfection in the realm of essence? I am holy/sacred. I am holy.” She suggests the below physical bowing practice to immerse more deeply in the mantra. What is most important is to do what feels best to you, bowing or no bowing, it is about immersing in the meaning:

*It is perfect* (bow forward)
*You are loved* (bow right)
*All is clear* (bow left)
*I am holy* (raise arms and hands toward the sky)

**Sweeping (or vacuuming) the mind of debris**
As you breathe in, imagine your breath is sweeping/vacuuming your mind, gathering up old and no longer useful thought patterns. When an area is clean, take a deep breath in for 4 seconds, hold the breath in for a count of 7, and with a long exhale (typically 8 seconds, but no need to count) imagine that you are releasing the old thoughts out of your inner space into a dustpan or vacuum bag. Take a moment to reflect on the old belief patterns that are in the dustpan/vacuum bag.

Next you can move to other parts of your body where you may sense stress/trauma, often feeling like uncomfortable emotions or physical tension. Sweep each area with your breath, gathering and exhaling the debris out of your safe inner space. After each area is complete, focus on your natural breath and take a few minutes to notice how you feel.

**Prayer of Forgiveness**
If I have harmed anyone in any way either knowingly or unknowingly through my own confusions I ask their forgiveness.
If anyone has harmed me in any way either knowingly or unknowingly through their own confusions I forgive them.
And if there is a situation I am not yet ready to forgive I forgive myself for that.
For all the ways that I harm myself, negate, doubt, belittle myself, judge or be unkind to myself through my own confusions I forgive myself. ~ Author unknown

**Ho’oponopono**
Another well-known phrase/mantra practice, where you focus your attention on repeating phrases, is Ho-o-pono-pono (Vitale & Len, 2008). In Hawaii, ho’oponopono means to make (ho’o) right (pono). Repeating ‘pono’ signifies a rightness with both self and others.
This practice helps us own our part in creating our experiences, “sweeping our side of the street”, so to speak. It also helps us to open to forgiveness and gratitude. The four mantras are:
“I’m SORRY”: taking responsibility
“PLEASE FORGIVE ME”: Forgiveness
“THANK YOU”: Gratitude
“I LOVE YOU”: Love

**The Elemental Breaths** (Sufi Healing Order, 2018)
Breathing naturally, go through five or more cycles, focusing on each of the five elements:
Earth: Inhale nose, exhale nose
Breath in the magnetism of the earth, feeling it nurture and ground you and as you breathe out send any tensions down into the earth for healing.

**Water:** Inhale nose, exhale mouth
Imagine yourself under a waterfall. With each breath imagine the water pouring onto you, cleansing you, refreshing every cell in your body. Feel and taste the life-giving quality of the water as it purifies you, taking with it any old ways of being that are no longer serving you.

**Fire:** Inhale mouth, exhale nose.
Breathe in the fire of transmutation, letting the warmth of the fire travel deep into your belly, transmuting any tension, resentment, and stored angst into light and love. As you breathe in the fire through your mouth, breathe out the light of love through your nose, sending compassion out into the world.

**Air:** Inhale and exhale mouth
Breathe in the blue sky, feeling it fill you with space, and releasing you from attachments. With each breath, feel yourself breathing and being breathed by the vast blue sky.

**Ether:** Fine breath, inhaling and exhaling through the nose
Breathe in the white light of Ether, the culmination of all of the elemental breaths, with each breath, immersing deeper into stillness and peace.

**Attuning to Self: ‘Real’ Goals versus ‘Ideal’ Goals**
Now we know more about the ‘real’ self versus the ‘ideal’ self we often ascribe to. Dropping into our inner world enables us to decipher between the two. Goals and actions that align with the ‘real’ self stir us; this may feel like a gentle pull, a WANT, a LONGing. Accessing desire is imperative to aligning our goals with our essence. When we own our goals, ensuring align with our desires, we are far more likely to reach them. When obstacles arise, we are more likely to stay motivated, knowing that our efforts are a worthy investment, propelled forward by a power greater than ourselves; this is living a calling.

Circling back to previous reflections, if you were unencumbered by feelings of guilt or fear and you lived the life you wanted to live, what would be different? How would that feel? How would it change your life? What would you be doing then that you aren’t doing now? What would you be allowing then that you aren’t now? What are the obstacles to attaining what you desire? What actions are necessary to navigate the obstacles? What qualities of self do you require to take these actions? When will you take these actions?

*The difference between our dreams and goals is that goals are dreams with actionable timelines and a felt sense of accountability to reach them.*

**Common Challenges with Mindfulness**
Mindful presence, internal focus, and meditation can all be difficult, especially in the beginning, but working through the challenges is a worthy investment. I guarantee there will be times when you feel you are not “doing it right”. Don’t worry, this is a normal part of the process as you gain familiarity with what works and what doesn’t work for you. The most common challenges are:

1. **Inconsistency**
We have plenty of distractions in our day that encourage mindlessness, and relatively few cues that remind us to be mindful. As a result, unless we set up our own reminders to be still and present through the day, mindlessness will sabotage our efforts. Many of us are adept at multi-tasking and live highly scheduled and over-stimulated lives. As a result, we are more familiar with using our busy-ness to distract us from our discomforts, and less familiar with responding to discomforts by dropping into our inner worlds to resolve them. These distractions work against our efforts to stay connected to our senses, desires, and emotions.
Variety, or sampling of the practices such as those listed above, is necessary to find practices that are enjoyable and self-soothing, but too much jumping around prevents us from progressing from effort to ease. Rituals (like the “stress busting” rituals mentioned in Part IV) can cue us to engage in a self-soothing practice. For instance, when anxiety wells up, if we have an established routine response, the emotion triggers our self-soothing. When self-soothing in the face of suffering becomes a habit, effort subsides, and we begin to engage in the ritual automatically. Without practice, however, switching from the thinking mode to the sensing mode takes great effort; as a result, in a moment of stress we often reach for relief in whatever form we are most comfortable with, which for many makes external distractions an enticing option.

So, here’s a solution. Just as we carve out time for appointments, meetings, events, brushing our teeth, meals, etc. we can schedule in time to meditate. Just like brushing our teeth is a habit that feels easy, with consistent practice, mindfulness and meditation starts with effort but overtime becomes easier, even automatic. Begin small, starting at as little as three minutes. Create a ritual; consistency is more important than duration. The best time to meditate is unique to each person, play with a few time slots, and reflect on the impact. For example, many people find that the morning is a good time to set mindfulness intentions for the day. Another great time is after work, enabling us to switch gears before dinner and evening activities.

II. Emotional Discomfort

When you avoid the uncomfortable emotions that result from incongruence (living a prescribed ideal that does not align with our ‘real’ self), your shame festers. Re-orient yourself to these emotions. Uncomfortable emotions are a cue to drop in, to bring unconditional positive regard to forbidden, unforgiven, and unhealed wounds. Illuminate the darkness with unconditional positive regard, uncovering your shame and enabling you to heal the old wounds beneath them.

If we experience a rush of negative emotions, every time we sit to meditate, it would be natural to feel meditation averse. We have to remember that meditation is an opportunity for emotional healing. When we meditate, we become more connected to our emotions, our desires, and our longings. Unresolved emotions from past events or traumas will often spring up during meditation, providing an opportunity for healing. Knowing that the experience of uncomfortable emotions is often a pathway to healing them can help us to avoid avoiding them. However, knowing that our focus is on healing does not always take away our suffering. Suffering is a normal part of being human. While not all suffering is necessary, at times we must walk through suffering, doing the necessary grieving work, to resolve our past traumas.

When feeling emotional discomfort, try to remember that meditation is about letting things be as they are, providing an opportunity to cultivate non-attachment, openness, patience, and loving-kindness. Rather than focusing on resisting or changing what is happening, try letting things be. When emotions are too intense or “sticky” to observe objectivity, turn your attention to an object of focus (breath, mantra, visual sense, auditory sense, olfactory sense, etc.). Let the emotion fall into the background. Build the strengthening practices described above into your habit.

III. Physical Distractions and Discomforts

When we drop in, we slow down, get quiet, and tune into the inner world. However, when busyness subsides, every itch and ache seems exponentially more pressing. This is normal.

With practice, we become adept at noticing distracting sensations (physical and emotional) and our thoughts about the sensations, validating them, and then letting them fall into the background. Doing this, we continually bring our attention back to our object of focus. Another approach is to bring our focus to
the discomfort, whether an emotion or a sensation, cultivating a sense of curiosity as it rises, falls, and evolves. Both strategies, whether moving our discomfort to the background of our consciousness or making it the object of focus, enable us to view it as an impartial observer, accepting it as it is without feeling threatened by it. Practicing non-attachment from our discomfort is essential. When we attach and identify with thoughts, emotions, and sensations, we often feel threatened and oppressed by them, fueling our suffering. However, when we recognize them without identifying with them, we prevent feeling threatened by them, making them stimuli we can objectively manage as opposed to threatening stressors. As an optimistic re-orientation, remind yourself that each difficult meditation session is training our brains. The next time an uncomfortable emotion emerges at work, we are more likely to step back from it, recognizing it as a stimulus to manage rather than a threatening stressor.

IV. Unrealistic Expectations
Meditation is a fluid, sometimes cyclical, process. There is no finish line. Some days will feel easy and other days it will be hard work. Sessions that are difficult, full of seemingly unproductive mind wandering and boredom can feel like frustrating setbacks. These sessions are not failures; quite the opposite, after a long period of mindlessness (immersed in thoughts of the past and future), taking time to meditate is an excellent way to switch gears, resetting, and re-orienting by moving into sensing mode, attending to what is happening in the moment. Meditation enables our over-stimulated brains to relax.

By cultivating an optimistic perspective (and thus improving our sense of coherence), we are more able to view all meditation experiences as worthy investments, trusting that it is all a necessary part of our development process. With consistent practice, the habits of mindfulness and meditation will become more automatic, but that journey is not linear.

V. Self-doubt and Self-depreciating thoughts
“Is this even working?” “Am I doing this right?” “I’m getting worse rather than better at this!” “There must be something wrong with me.” “This doesn’t work for me.” These are all common thoughts that crop up when we start something new. Feelings of incompetence are normal as we take on new habits! Practice breeds familiarity resulting in feelings of competence and confidence; this is moving from effort to ease. Some people’s brains and habits enable a better ability to relax into mediation, resulting in greater feelings of ease in the process. Others will have to work at it more, especially in the beginning. There is no ‘right’ way. Just as there is no magic bullet prescription that works for all people and all conditions, there is no single effective approach to meditation. What is most important is holding intentions for mindfulness/meditation that motivate us to practice consistently.

Rather than judging the self-doubt and self-deprecation that spring up, practice non-attachment. That means recognizing that any of the thoughts above are just that – passing thoughts. They are not facts. When negative thoughts arise, consider it an opportunity to practice self-compassion and to cultivate openness and patience. Speak kindly to the negative thoughts that spring up, acknowledging them, and investigating them with curiosity. When we step back from the thoughts, we transform judgment into curiosity, creating a safe space for emotions to come and go without triggering a reaction. With re-orientation, even the emotions that result from self-depreciating thoughts can be a gift as they can prompt us to step back (non-attachment), interrupt rumination, and provide an opportunity to practice self-compassion.

The Journey Ahead
In Part V we came to know how sense of coherence intertwines with mindfulness. Through mindfulness, we can objectively orient ourselves to the outer world and the evolving stimuli that requires our attention.
We are strengthening our sense of coherence by building mindful habits and by aligning our goals with the desires that we are connecting to as we drop into the inner world. In Part VI we dig even deeper, continuing to attune and strengthen our connection to the inner world, cultivating a sanctuary that calls us in. As we cultivate a sanctuary within the inner world, we continue to heal the wounds from old trauma. Despite the difficulties, we will continue with loving-kindness, striving to clean and clear, knowing that the end product is a space where we feel safe, where we will find comfort. Developing these deep roots, cultivating this sanctuary, promotes a greater likelihood to look within for soothing (as opposed to turning to substances and activities for soothing). “Mindfulness opens a door of awareness to who we are and character strengths are what is behind the door since character strengths are who we are at core” (Niemiec, 2014).
PART VI: Re-Parenting Ourselves: Tilling the Soil of our Childhoods

When we retrieve the lost parts of ourselves from the shadows of our youth, our connection to the inner world strengthens, empowering us to continue toward wholeness.

Before I launch into what the research has to say about our childhoods, please know, many of us did not have a child-centered upbringing and that many of us struggle to provide this to our children. In other words, you are in good company! No parent is perfect and expecting perfection from ourselves or others only fuels shame and incongruence within ourselves and onto others. Embracing this progress not perfection approach, shows others and our children, we too make mistakes, have difficult days, say things and do things we regret; that this is part of being human. In this environment, it is less about not making mistakes, and more about learning from them and doing our best to make amends when helpful. In this light, if reading this chapter is difficult, practice extending grace, a core characteristic of self-compassion. Use the emotional messages that may arise to practice stepping back (non-attachment) and extending loving-kindness.

As adults, we get another chance to retrieve those forbidden parts of ourselves, those parts we left behind as children. When re-connected to the inner world, we have the ability resolve past trauma and be re-parent and spur on the growth of the underdeveloped/childlike parts of ourselves. In this environment of unconditional positive regard aimed inwardly (self-compassion), we gain the security and confidence to be vulnerable, to express our ‘real’ selves (congruence). In other words, improving self-compassion is the antidote to the shame of incongruence; it is the medicine that will heal old wounds. Rather than silencing the forbidden parts of self as we have come accustomed, we can stop, listen, and respond as a loving parent would. Nurturing our self in this way, provides a safe space to feel what previously felt unsafe to feel, to listen to what was previously too difficult to hear, and to embrace that which felt like the enemy. We become emotionally whole and as a result, congruent. This curriculum provides the tools and techniques necessary to re-parent yourself, healing old wounds, and re-orienting old belief systems so we can connect to our highest and most whole self.

The Child-Centered Upbringing

Imagine you are 6-years old. You just came home from school and you are tired and hungry. Your mom/dad is in the kitchen, working on dinner and you are feeling antsy and grumpy. School wore you out socially, but your too restless to play by yourself and finding something to deal with your boredom will require more effort than you are capable of. You hover around your mom/dad, wanting their attention, but because you are tired, it comes out as whining. You are told to go and play, as they need to finish dinner, which only inflames your grumpiness and now you are feeling hurt too, which evolves into frustration and then anger. You go into the living room and dump out your toys, choosing a few choice/fragile looking ones to throw across the room. Your mom/dad comes into the room, you brace yourself for the reaction. Your mom/dad takes a deep breath, gathering themselves, walks over to you and asks if you need a hug. You react with a “no!” Because you still feel angry, you aren’t able to receive the hug, but the loving response de-escalates your anger and soothes the hurt beneath it. Your mom/dad sits on the floor, close enough to let you know they are there but providing enough space to show that wanting distance is okay too. When your defences fall away, you soften and your desire to connect and to be comforted propels you into their arms. When you feel better, you release yourself from the embrace. Your mom/dad goes back to the kitchen to finish their work, letting you know when ready, they will let you know, providing enough time to tidy up. You are still tired, but it feels more manageable now. You look at all of the toys laid out before you and start to play.

Many of us may not easily relate to the illustration above, as a child or as a now parent. However, I’m hoping you can see the undertones of unconditional love and acceptance of the child/person, even when
we do not agree with their behaviours. These characteristics are the principles that underlie child-centered parenting. Amato and Kane (2011) described the influence of our childhood experience as follows:

In general, the most important factors...to experience high or low levels of psychosocial adjustment are present in their families of origin and their experiences during childhood and adolescence, before their decisions to attend college, obtain full-time employment, cohabit, marry, or have children. (p. 293)

A warm, cohesive, nurturing, and supportive relationship with at least one parent is an essential component of a child-centered environment (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003). Superle (2016) described it as empowering children to “shape themselves and their surroundings through their input, values, decisions, and action [rather than] as blank slates to be filled with correct ideas so that they could fit into society” (p.144). The first two decades of life are when people gain an orientation to life and where they develop their sense of coherence or the self-actualizing/thriving tendencies they carry into adulthood. These experiences promote “a deep belief that life has meaning and that each of us have a place in the universe...[and] is probably the most powerful [strength] in propelling young people to healthy outcomes despite adversity” (Benard, 2004, p. 28). Furthermore, children who have experience and internalized this positive regard are more empathetic, more autonomous, and more likely to help others (Roth, 2008). In a similar vein, as we internalize unconditional positive regard, we too can be more empathetic, more grounded in our roots (buffering us from external weather) and are then more likely to have a genuine desire to help others.

Children shown unconditional positive regard may have heard messages like this:
- “You’re worthy of love as you are, you don’t need to earn my love”
- “I accept you, all of you, without condition.”
- “I may not like all of your choices, but your choices are not a condition for my love.”
- “It’s okay to make mistakes, we all do. Making mistakes is part of being human and can be a great learning opportunity.”
- "I am here to help you, to guide you when you want and need it, not to tear you down through criticism.”
- “I want you to be yourself, not the self that others tell you to be.”

Those of us who did not experience unconditional positive regard are more likely to repress our emotions through childhood. The more repression we have, the more incongruence and shame we have, and the more we will unintentionally project our festering shame onto others. During my own childhood, there were adults who showed me conditional positive regard, who communicated to me that I was not worthy of love and acceptance unless I met certain expectations. There also were adults who showed that they would accept me no matter what, but until I was an adult, I did not believe it to be true. Because I did not believe it, I could not internalize it as a child, and instead I lived as though I needed to play to an ‘ideal’ to be loved, pushing many of the ‘real,’ seemingly less desirable parts of myself into the shadows. It took me many years through my adulthood to learn to internalize unconditional positive regard. To believe it is true, I have learned that we must test our relationships by talking about parts of ourselves that feel conditionally loved and accepted. I have learned that loving and accepting relationships don’t require us to hide parts of ourselves, even if they are less liked than others. We are a package, and relationships with unconditional positive regard accept the whole package. This process feels and felt like giving myself permission to re-parent myself, mirroring the unconditional positive regard shown to me by others inwardly (self-compassion), and reminding myself that I am good enough, as is, no conditional attached. Based on my research and personal experience, with time, self-compassion, and intention, we can move through our past trauma and become congruent. In time, we become more whole and more ourselves.
Applying the literature to caregivers, those who experienced a childhood that provided a self-actualizing environment are in a position of privilege for being able to cope with higher stimulus or stressful conditions, compared to those who have not. Those who developed self-actualizing tendencies in childhood will be more likely to resolve areas of emotional dissonance, garner protective resources against stress, and feel empowered to enact change as adults. Additionally, child-centered parenting promotes sense of coherence (described in Part V), promoting a greater ability to manage stress and as a result, to engage in thriving (Eriksson & Lindström, 2007; Wijk & Waters, 2008). Therefore, those who enter their career with a higher sense of coherence will have more confidence in their ability to navigate stimuli before they become stressors, producing a greater ability to deal with occupational challenges. In summary, the ability to be congruent and to thrive begins at a young age, with those nurtured by child-centered parenting showing higher levels of self-actualization and higher sense of coherence scores (Feldt, Kokko, Kinnunen, & Pulkkinen, 2005). Another impactful factor in our ability to self-actualize in adulthood is the experience of childhood adversity.

The Impact of Childhood Adversity

Whether or not we experience unconditional positive regard from one or more adult in our childhood, most of us have also had significant negative experiences, such physical, emotional, sexual or verbal abuse, the loss of a loved one, extreme poverty, divorce of parents, etc. In a study performed in the United States between 1995 and 1997, over 17,000 participants were asked to provide information about their childhood in conjunction with a physical exam. The results were astounding with dozens of publications underscoring the connection between childhood adversities/trauma, social challenges, unhealthy life choices, and a myriad of physical and mental illnesses in adulthood (CDC, 2014).

Adults with adverse experiences in childhood are less likely to have high sense of coherence in adulthood (Bruskas & Tessin, 2013). Those of us who faced chronic adversity/trauma in childhood are more likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders later on, and unsurprisingly may find it more difficult to identify and manage triggers when they arise in the workplace (Breslau, Chilcoat, Kessler, & Davis, 1999; Fossion et al., 2014; Green, Goodman, Krupnick, Corcoran, Petty, Stockton, & Stern, 2000; Sullivan, Mkabile, Fincham, Ahmed, Stein, & Seedat, 2009). Having many childhood adversities sensitizes us to stressful events later in life, which then makes us more prone to negative physical and psychological health impacts. The feeling is that the trauma is still close to the skin and can break out again at any moment. Our remaining sensitivity to triggers, because of childhood traumas, weakens our sense of coherence as adults (Fossion et al., 2014). What started as unfair in childhood can evolve into further inequity in adulthood. For instance, if emotions felt unacceptable and shameful as a child, we are prone to have developed a habit of dissociating from them, pushing them down instead of letting them out. Dissociating habitually into adulthood fuels shame and incongruence, making them more at risk maladaptive psychological states (Perry, Pollard, Blakley, Baker, & Vigilante, 1995).

Evidence suggests, and my experience corroborates, that those of us who experienced a childhood environment with unconditional positive regard, and who experienced fewer adversities, will enter adulthood with a greater ability to manage our emotions. As adults we will more readily build our sense of coherence and congruence, basically because it is already an established habit from childhood. On the other hand, those of us who did not have a self-actualizing childhood experience may need to seek opportunities to develop these skills in our adult years. Many caregivers are still young adults, going from their high school years right into the profession – this makes it even less likely that they have developed emotional management skills.
Unconditional Positive Regard: The Fertilizer for Deep Roots

Within an environment where we can be and feel what IS, rather than putting on a prescribed display of what others may prefer, we can develop into our most authentic and congruent self. In this way, unconditional positive regard is like a fertilizer for our emotional development, maturing us into grounded, largely self-sufficient and self-soothing beings. To be clear, providing unconditional positive regard is not to be confused with condoning harmful behaviours. The most loving relationships have clear and respectful boundaries. Without clear boundaries, whereby we express our expectations and needs, we are likely to grow resentful when others inadvertently offend us. Rather than viewing it as a blanket approval of all behaviour, it is more accurately a blanket approval of all people, undergirded by an insistent belief in the unchangeable worth and value of ourselves and others. It is not about saying the right thing, being police, being nice, etc. It’s about genuinely believing others are worthy of love and acceptance. It’s believing that one’s inherent value does not change, even when they have a bad day, say the wrong thing, or do the wrong thing and as a result, hurt themselves or others. Again, we aren’t agreeing with their choices, we are agreeing that their essence is ultimately and unchangeably worthy of love.

Those who experienced unconditional positive regard from a parent will naturally mirror the same behaviour inwardly; as a result, they will evolve into adults with high levels of self-compassion. Adding to this, those who are then more self-compassionate parents, are then more able to mindfully parent, providing a child-centered upbringing, characterized by unconditional positive regard, for their children (Gouveia, Carona, Canavarro, & Moreira, 2016). Even if you didn’t receive this form of compassion and unconditional acceptance as a child, you can still learn it as an adult! Unconditional positive regard for self enables self-soothing, re-parenting us, enabling an ability to love and accept what is, even if what is, even in our grumpiest moments. Self-soothing happens when we drop into our roots, focusing on the inner world, and consoling ourselves like we would a dear friend or child. When we self-soothe, we stay connected to our desires and values amid suffering. Our connection to emotions (accepting and soothing what is), and to our values and desires (to rest, to be alone, to socialize, etc.) promotes congruence. When we rely on external activities or substances instead, failing to attend to emotional messages, we develop habits of distraction and dissociation, losing connection with our inner world, and adding to our propensity for incongruent and often impulsive behaviours. Self-compassion comes more easily to some of us because of how we were raised. A childhood full of the experience of unconditional positive regard provides a rich soil for growing the roots of congruence and sense of coherence. Children who felt unconditionally accepted and supported were more likely to express and process their emotions and instead of repressing them.

Development of these skills is a natural product of a nurturing childhood influenced by parental values, child-centered parenting, and an experience of emotional closeness (Fossion, Leys, Kempenaers, Braun, Verbanck, & Linkowski, 2014). Some caregivers will have developed emotional management skills in their childhood, which they can then use with ease as adults and professionals in their place of work. Others may not have had this childhood opportunity, entering adulthood and their professional role with a distinct coping disadvantage. If this is the case, when provided with the tools to do so, they may have the advantage of time; time to work through trauma outside of their house of origin, time to heal incongruencies, time to seek help when needed, and time to develop relationships of unconditional positive regard.

Wisdom with Age and Generational Differences

Time does heal. Or rather, the skills needed for healing are acquired over time. Sense of coherence scores, for example, tend to rise as individuals age (Eriksson & Lindström, 2005; Merakou, Xeftieri, & Barbouni, 2016; Wieck et al., 2010). More senior nurses are less likely to experience intense negative emotions (Erickson and Grove, 2007), often associated with moral injury and burnout, and more likely to express self-
compassion (Dev, Fernando, Lim and Consedine, 2018). Those older than 30 are often more resilient to work environments that involve a high level of emotional stress (Erol & Orth, 2011; Lindmark, Stenström, Gerdin, & Hugoson, 2010). Conversely, Leiter, Jackson, and Shaughnessy (2009) found that younger nurses had more stress in the work because they felt less aligned with their values, perhaps due to a lack of confidence to express them at work, which led to higher levels of burnout.

Perhaps another related factor that impacts the ability to exercise our values at work relates to generational preferences. Furthermore, different generations have varying expectations surrounding work and social etiquette, which may contribute to the hostility correlated with higher turnover and the negative mental and physical health symptoms amongst novice caregivers (Leiter, Price, & Spence Laschinger, 2010). Even without taking age into account, higher levels of stress correlate with lower sense of coherence (Pallant & Lae, 2002). Because age is an additional influential factor in the ability to survive and thrive early on as caregivers, awareness and preparation for this vulnerability is a worthy effort in post-secondary training and novice caregiver work settings.

Clearing Practice: Perceived Unconditional Positive Regard as Children

This questionnaire was created by two psychologists (Rains & McClinn, 2013), modeled after the ‘Adverse Childhood Experience’ research (described above), reflecting the significance of unconditional positive regard (perceived). It provides an opportunity to reflect on our childhood perception of unconditional positive regard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please mark the answer that is the most accurate for each statement.</th>
<th>Definitely True</th>
<th>Probably True</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>Probably Not True</th>
<th>Definitely Not True</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe that my mother loved me when I was little.</td>
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<td>2. I believe that my father loved me when I was little.</td>
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<td>3. When I was little, other people helped my mother and father take care of me and they seemed to love me.</td>
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<td>4. I’ve heard that when I was an infant someone in my family enjoyed playing with me, and I enjoyed it, too.</td>
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<td>5. When I was a child, there were relatives in my family who made me feel better if I was sad or worried.</td>
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<td>6. When I was a child, neighbors or my friends’ parents seemed to like me.</td>
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<td>7. When I was a child, teachers, coaches, youth leaders or ministers were there to help me.</td>
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8. Someone in my family cared about how I was doing in school.

9. My family, neighbors and friends talked often about making our lives better.

10. We had rules in our house and were expected to keep them.

11. When I felt really bad, I could almost always find someone I trusted to talk to.

12. As a youth, people noticed that I was capable and could get things done.

13. I was independent and a go-getter.

14. I believed that life is what you make it.

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How many of these 14 protective factors did I have as a child/youth? (How many of the 14 were marked “Definitely True” or “Probably True”?) ________________________________

Of the 14 that I marked “Definitely True” or “Probably True”, how many are still true for me?

_________________________________________________________________________

This exercise prompts reflection, illuminating our vulnerabilities so we can work with them and in some situations, even clear them. As a result, we can then develop the roots that will bolster our ability to manage external (and internal) stimuli, preventing us from succumbing to chronic stress. The point of the exercise is NOT to label or limit ourselves, nor is it to encourage self-destructive thought patterns. Please remember that a secure childhood, where one believes they were unconditionally and positively regarded, is a luxury. If you didn’t get one, you are in good company! As we move into adulthood, we can re-parent the pieces of ourselves that require nurturing. If stress emerges based on your results, practice responding with loving-kindness.

The Journey Ahead
In Part VI, we discussed the benefits and process of re-parenting ourselves, tilling the soil, enabling our roots to deepen. As we cultivate connection to the inner world by dropping into our roots, we are learning to console ourselves like we would a friend or child. We are continuing to develop a habit of leaning into the inner world, accessing our inner resources to confidently navigate challenges. Through this re-orientation strategy, we reminded of who we really are, and coming to love and accept all parts of ourselves. With effort and practice, we are returning to wholeness. In Part VII we continue to cultivate sanctuary, exploring strategies that clean and clear old wounds to find calm amidst the chaos.
Part VII: Self-Soothing: Calm at the Roots

*Self-soothing happens when we drop into our roots, focusing on the inner world and consoling our self like we would a friend or child. Grounding and calming our roots provides a sense of safety and security that enables us to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is a required to authentically connect with others.*

We’ve covered aspects of self-soothing in the sections above, when speaking about self-compassion, speaking to our emotions, and responding to stress triggers. In this section, we will explore aspects of self-soothing and finding soothing relationships. First, by exploring our attachment tendencies in relationships with others, we come to recognize our subconscious defense mechanisms. With recognition, we have an ability to mindfully re-parent and soothe those wounded areas, enabling us to connect to others from a grounded and secure place. Soothing can come through loving-kindness, physical touch, optimistic re-orientation, gratitude, and forgiveness practices.

**Working with our Attachment Tendencies**

In childhood, our ability to attach to a primary parent or guardian forms the basis of our adult attachment style (Bowlby, 2012). Mary Ainsworth, a foundational researcher in attachment styles, defines attachment behavior as the “behavior through which a discriminating, differential, affectional relationship is established with a person or object, and which tends to evoke a response from the object, and thus initiates a chain of interaction which serves to consolidate the affectional relationship” (1964, p. 51). In other words, our ability to connect to a primary caregiver as children directly impacts our ability to forge healthy connections to others as adults. In general, if we felt rejected by our caregiver’s inability to emotionally connect, we will tend to anxiously cling to others. If we felt smothered because they relied on us to meet their emotional needs, we will tend to avoid and retreat from attachment to others. Our attachment develops in stages ranging from immature dependent security, completely dependent on others for security, to mature dependant security, where we can give and receive in our connection to others from a secure sense of self (Blatz, 1967). For example, those who are closer to the dependant side of the spectrum will tend to come from a glass half empty approach, yearning to be filled by another. Those closer to mature dependant security will tend to come from a glass half full perspective, connecting from a more grounded and optimistic place. People able to progress through the stages and come to mature dependent security will form mutually interdependent relationships in their adulthood (Blatz, 1967). Interdependence is a balance of recognizing our dependence on others and honoring our independence as a unique individual. I discuss further interdependent relationships in Part IX.

Because of our progression through the attachment stages, in adulthood we will gravitate to one of three broad attachment categories;

- avoiding attachment,
- secure attachment (springing from perceived unconditional positive regard as a child),
- anxious attachment,

The latter two (avoidant and anxious attachment) both spring from perceived *conditional* regard and rejection as a child (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Children with repetitive and/or unresolved trauma may also develop avoidant attachment styles even when experiencing unconditional positive regard (Morina, Schnyder, Schick, Nickerson, & Bryant, 2016). Unfortunately, most of us fall along the edges of the attachment spectrum, either avoiding intimacy or anxiously attaching to others, with those who easily form secure attachments in the minority. The good news is that attachment styles are not fixed traits. Like most of our inner workings when we come to recognize our attachment style and the patterns (either
negative or positive) that spring from it, we have a new opportunity to heal the old wounds at the roots. In time and with mindful practice, we can re-orient ourselves and our relationships.

**Attuning Practice: Experience in Close Relationship Quiz**

Instructions: Using the following lists of characteristics, adapted from Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt and Vogel’s Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (2007), note the with which category you resonate most. Try to be mindful of your experiences in past relationships as well as any currents ones. Remember, our attachment tendencies are not fixed and we can move either direction on the spectrum, based on our exposure to trauma, our sense of coherence, and our degree of congruence.

Those closer to the anxious attachment end of the spectrum are more likely to resonate with these characteristics:

- I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
- I find that my partner/friends don't want to get as close as I would like.
- My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
- I often worry about being abandoned.
- I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
- I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.

Tips to challenge your place on the anxious side of the spectrum:

You are more likely to focus on external stimuli than internal stimuli. As a result, subtle feelings often go unnoticed until they build and compound, until suddenly they feel intense and overwhelming. Stress/anxiety emerges from a fear of not getting our basic need for love and acceptance met. Taking a step back from the intensity of the emotion enables you to keep the feeling in perspective, investigate it with a sense of curiosity, and with mindfulness practice and time, to re-orient yourself. If you cannot gain perspective (objectivity through non-attachment), talking to an objective other, such as a friend or counsellor, can be helpful.

*Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary (Fred Rogers)*

Besides strengthening your connection to the inner world, also take stock of your external resources. It is best to diversify yourself, which prevents you from putting all of your relational eggs/needs in one basket/person.

Those who tend to avoid attachment are more likely to resonate with these characteristics:

- I rarely turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
- I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
- I don’t often turn to my partner for things, including comfort and reassurance.
I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
I don’t often discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
I often feel nervous when partners get too close to me.

**Tips to challenge your place on the avoidant side of the spectrum:**
You are more likely to retreat inwardly, keeping emotions to yourself, and to ruminate on fears (worry) when uncertainty presents. Practice interrupting this pattern by talking about your emotions to another person or if more comfortable, talk to the emotion. Talking about or to the emotion creates a space between the emotion and the essence of who we are, enabling us to take notice when ruminating, to question the veracity of the thoughts behind the emotion and to stop over identifying with it. When you cannot gain objectivity (unable to practice non-attachment) from strong emotions and thought rumination, use a cortisol mitigation tools (Part IV) like a bout of intense exercise or bathing in nature. Talk about your day, even the parts that you fear will seem dull. Practicing in this way, promotes an ability to be vulnerable with others, to authentically express yourself in safe spaces.

Starting out slow is important, ensuring that you do not feel so vulnerable that you get hijacked by the stress response, leading to high cortisol (see Part II), causing you to fight, flee, or freeze. Small steps keeps you moving forward, practicing in ways that feel safe and that enable you to remain objective (or at least maintain windows of objectivity). If you take too large of a step, you may find your felt need to retreat (stress response) overrides your efforts. If you retreat, that’s okay, it’s part of the learning process.

Trust takes time and part of gaining trust is learning to trust yourself and the pace in which you feel safe moving. Experiment with different techniques, with getting close to others. Practice leaning on people in small ways, investigate how it feels. If feelings get intense, practice self-compassion and self-kindness by allowing yourself to take a step back. Taking a break, even stepping back, is not necessarily retreating or dissociating (although without mindfulness it can be), rather it can provide an opportunity to mindfully create space (non-attachment) between the event and the emotions triggered by the event. The desire to retreat/emotionally dissociate comes from fear. We can catch ourselves before we retreat by noticing when it is happening (catch the sense of panic emerging) and acting (via non-attachment) before we react.

To process, digest, and ultimately heal the wounds beneath our avoidant tendencies, it is helpful to identify a ritual (hobby, nature) or person (or animal) that provides a sense of emotional safety for you. To clarify, we use rituals in these moments to connect and empower, not to distract us from acknowledging and healing our wounds/suffering. Rituals cue us, enabling us to find order in moments that feel chaotic. We all need a certain degree of order, grounding us in times of chaos (a component of sense of coherence). These safe spaces, cued and created by ritual, provide an environment where we feel safe to be vulnerable. It takes vulnerability to feel our emotions. We must feel our emotions to walk through grievance and suffering. On the other side of grievance/suffering is healing and ultimately, emancipation from the suffering associated with old (often festering) wounds.

To summarize, when the intense feelings emerge, take notice. Once you notice, create space by engaging in a comforting ritual or talking to a trusted friend/loved one. When we create safe spaces and cultivate a sense of curiosity, we are more likely to observe and even welcome the experience as it is (rather than resisting it as it is or avoiding it altogether). Take it slow, remember, healing often happens in layers and there is no need to remove multiple layers at a time.

**Strengthening Practice: Promoting Secure Attachment through ‘Priming’**
Priming is the practice of visualizing an attachment to a person or object of comfort that promotes feelings of calm and ease. For example, my late grandmother is my go-to person of comfort as she emanated unconditional positive regard for me. Research suggests that priming with this person or object of comfort increases feelings of security and decreases anxiety and depression (Carnelley, Bejinaru, Otway, Baldwin, & Rowe, 2018). It can also weaken memories and intrusive thoughts of traumatic events (Bryant & Foord, 2016). On a side note, that those of us with avoidant attachment styles are less likely to experience the benefits from attachment security priming. However, if this activity interests you follow your curiosity.

The practice of attachment security priming is simple. Begin by taking a few minutes to write about a relationship where you experience secure attachment. It can be romantic partner, a friend, a colleague, a pet, or any relationship at all. If you do not have a relationship where you experience secure attachment write about what a relationship like that would look like. Close your eyes and visualize this person in your mind. This visualization is the act of attachment security priming. Doing these visualizations regularly taps into the benefits of the secure attachment spoken about above.

**Soothing with Loving-kindness**

Loving-kindness emerges from grace and is characterized by gentleness, consideration, and kindness to ourselves and others. By soothing ourselves with loving-kindness, we are more likely to allow uncomfortable feelings (anxiety, depression, sadness, jealousy, etc.) to come and go, recognizing that they are a normal part of the human experience. Recognizing suffering and investigating how feelings of threat are often because of unhealed moral injuries or a reflection of those parts of self we have not yet retrieved from our shadow, enables us to embrace the healing opportunity. Loving-kindness practices are a doorway to connection and compassion, which transmute emotions born out of disconnection. While self-compassion develops from being brought up in environments characterized by unconditional positive regard, as an adult, we can develop self-compassion by receiving and practicing loving-kindness.

According to the research, practicing loving-kindness for others and ourselves can reorient our perspective and evolve old thought patterns. By practicing loving-kindness toward self and others we can develop self-compassion and reduce symptoms related to PTSD and depression (Kearney et al., 2013). Habitual loving-kindness increases feelings of social connectedness and positivity toward others and lowers the risk of developing a host of mental and physical health conditions (Aspy & Proeve, 2017; Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008; Toussaint & Worthington, 2015).

*While drugs, sex, and sugar often result in a dopamine boost (our brain’s reward/pleasure neurotransmitter), so does immersing in feelings of gratitude and loving-kindness toward self and others.*

**Strengthening Practice: From Foe to Friend with Loving-Kindness**

An enemy is someone that poses a threat to our primary needs. Often, even when the actual threat dissipates or we put the perceived threat into perspective, we can hold onto resentments, causing the old wound to feel as raw as the day it formed. Loving-kindness enables us to step back from habitual thoughts that trigger reactive feeling states and hostile behaviours. When we stop and heartfully connect with the person by whom we feel threatened, we realize that they too are human, and that in this way, we are the same. In this sameness, they too suffer and they too have the same basic needs as we do. Underscored in the victim-perpetrator cycle, people that hurt do so because someone has hurt them. Seeing the wounds beneath the behaviors prevents us from taking the projections (harmful action born out of unresolved trauma) of others so personally. With practice and intention, we can shift our feelings toward others from the ‘threatening other’ to realizing that in our humanity, ‘we are the same;’ this shift results from connection through compassion. Performing a loving-kindness practice can occur in less than a minute, seizing a moment...
where you feel an inner prompt, or it can be a more formal sit-down practice. Quality is far more important than quantity. The key is to take the time to:

1. Drop into your inner space, letting go of external distractions.
2. Bring up an image of a loved one(s) emanating love for you; immerse and receive that love.
3. Direct feelings and phrases of love/well-wishes/compassion toward self-and/or another.

The details of how you immerse in feeling and in what form you send loving-kindness can vary depending on what feels more natural for you at that particular time and context. The most important aspect is that you FEEL connected to the experience, which requires a practice that mirrors how you would talk to a friend.

Transmuting stored resentment and shame requires deep connection to the experience, which can take practice. Remember, with practice we gain progress and overtime, as we take what works and leave what doesn’t, we gain habits that align with our ‘real’ selves. Another core piece of unconditional positive regard is acceptance. Using loving-kindness with the intent to fix a problem attaches a condition to the exercise. Loving-kindness without condition is about being with a feeling, acknowledging it, and soothing our suffering, not looking for the silver lining in it or trying to make it go away.

Nearly all meditations feel awkward, even robotic in the beginning. It is also normal to feel agitated, irritated, restless, or bored. These feelings are all normal and provide an opportunity to practice patience, and unconditional positive regard, enabling whatever comes up with loving acceptance. With this in mind, the script below will guide your practice. In the script below, you will begin by establishing a strong sense of unconditional positive regard for yourself, which then enables you to expand and extend the same to others. Some may find it too difficult to cultivate feelings of loving-kindness for self, and in this case, try cultivating the feelings by sending loving-kindness to others first. How you practice is completely up to you. The goal is to cultivate loving-kindness and as a result, open and connect more deeply to yourself and others.

The below mediation was adapted from The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace (2008) by Jack Kornfield, a renowned Buddhist and meditation teacher.

Keeping your eyes closed, think of someone from the past or the present who you believe loves you with unconditional positive regard. Feel the warmth and love they are emanating from their being toward you. Immerse in the unconditional love that they embody, allow yourself to soften and open in this safe space.

Picture the image of yourself in this safe space, perhaps as you are now or you as a child. Play with the images until you find one that resonates, opening your heart even more.

Repeat quietly to yourself (or adapt to phrases that speak to you):

May I be filled with lovingkindness.
May I be safe from inner and outer threats.
May I be well.
May I be at ease and happy.

As you go through the mantra, continue immersing in the feelings you generated earlier, let the images, feelings, and mantra sink deeply into your mind and body. This practice is best done daily or as often as
you can manage. Frequently connecting to yourself in this way will improve your ability to practice self-compassion.

Be aware that this meditation may at times feel mechanical or awkward. It can also bring up feelings contrary to lovingkindness, feelings of irritation and anger. If this happens, it is especially important to be patient and kind toward yourself, allowing whatever arises to be received in a spirit of friendliness and kind affection. When you feel you have established some stronger sense of lovingkindness for yourself, you can then expand your meditation to include others.

After focusing on yourself, choose a person who you care for. Picture this person in front of you. You and this person are alike. Just like you, this person wants to be happy. In this way, you are the same. Repeat the same phrases or adapt to others that speak to you:

*May you be filled with lovingkindness.*
*May you be safe from inner and outer threats.*
*May you be well.*
*May you be at ease and happy.*

Gradually extend your practice to include your inner circle, community members, colleagues, and then to all people and all beings on the earth.

While you continue to be immersed in feelings of loving-kindness, bring to mind the difficult relationships in your past and present, extending your feeling of loving-kindness to them and wishing them safety, wellness, and ease. Trust the process, with practice, your heart will open first to your loved ones and then to all. Once the heart is open, the sense of peace and joy that result will motivate you to continue the silent practice throughout your day. You can practice lovingkindness anywhere seconds or minutes at a time. For example, while waiting in line or in traffic, or when you are walking from one task to another, or while taking a quiet break at work. When working in groups, try deepening a sense of loving-kindness in the group by extending the practice to those on your right and on your left, to those in various organizational/team roles, etc.

Here is another loving-kindness practice, originating from traditional Buddhism, published in Singing the Journey (UUA, 2005, p.1031), and often used in song as a group or to yourself. You begin with ‘I’ and as you are filled, you then extend the versus outwardly:

*May I be filled with loving kindness.*
*May I be well.*
*May I be filled with loving kindness.*
*May I be well.*
*May I be peaceful and at ease.*
*May I be whole.*

*May you .....*  
*May we...]*  
*May all...*
**Attuning Tip: Directing loving-kindness inwardly**
When working with yourself, practice being with self, talking to yourself like a friend, using phrases that might sound like this, “I can see how much pain you are in” or “this is really difficult,” or “those beliefs are causing a great deal of suffering for you, I’m so sorry you’ve had to carry that for so long.” You could provide comfort within the suffering by saying things like, “you are safe” “you are loved.” Imagine a friend having the experience, what would you say to them? Can you treat yourself with the same loving-kindness? Establishing a relationship of unconditional positive regard requires us to accept what IS without a condition of change. Such relationships pave the way with an environment of trust and safety. Within this environment, the work of transforming old thought patterns via re-programming/re-parenting that are no longer serving us becomes possible.

When directing loving-kindness practices inwardly, it is most effective to use a third-person approach as it keeps us from attaching/identifying with the emotions that arise. We are not our emotions, nor are we simply a product of our experiences, and yet, we often fall prey to overly identifying with both. The essence of who we are is unrelated to thoughts, emotions, and experience. When we view thoughts, emotions, and experience from a more impartial place (non-attachment), we find a space between them and us, and in this space, we get a glimpse of who we really are; this is our essence. By using a third-person approach we create a space between the emotions that arise and the undigested experiences that can feel haunting. We can speak to and soothe these things without attaching to them.

**Soothing with Touch: Self-holding**
Physical touch has powerful physiological affects; it releases oxytocin, reduces cortisol, calms the cardiovascular system, reduces pain, improves learning, speeds wound healing, and has a host of other benefits (Lund et al., 2002; Uvnäs-Moberg & Petersson, 2010).

There are several ways to develop a stronger mind body connection, promoting the ability to self-sooth. For instance, connecting to your heart by placing a hand on the heart or feeling your pulse on your wrist or neck improves the heart and breath connection and lowers heart rate and blood pressure. Connecting to your body and breathe in this way has grounding effect. Similarly, placing a hand on top of your head can help you feel present to the moment and grounded in your body and to the earth. Crossing your arms, imitating a hug, can be a powerful way to feel held and to step back from the emotions of others. Placing your finger pads together can improve your ability to focus and stay alert to the moment. Touching your neck and face, where nerves are plentiful, has a comforting effect.

**Strengthening Practice: Soothing via physical connection**
There are a variety of ways to use physical touch to exercise self-kindness, which fuel feelings of unconditional positive regard for self (self-compassion). This exercise promotes feelings of safety and is a method of self-soothing.

Sit in a quiet place by yourself where others will not see you. Drop in to your inner space by focusing on your breath. Try these different positions and note how they feel to you. What feelings do you experience with each approach? Are there some that are more comforting than others?

- Notice how you feel when you breathe in and out of your heart space. Place your hand(s) on your heart.
- Now move your attention to your belly, noticing your breath moving in and out. Place your hand on your belly.
- Place one hand on your heart and another on your belly, let the inspiration flow deep into your belly and out of your heart.
• Now cross your arms, like you are hugging yourself. Maybe even rubbing your upper arms.
• Place your hand on the top of your head.
• Place your fingertips together, all five of the pads of your fingers connecting to one another.
• Hold your hands together, play with different positions.
• Stroke your neck; now move to your face.

This exercise is a starting point, a tool that builds awareness of how we feel when we connect to ourselves in a more physical way. It provides insight, builds our intuitive muscles, and strengthens feelings of trust and safety within (self-integrity); these are essential to effective self-soothing.

Because we are different, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Forcing an experience only fuels incongruence. Mindfulness enables us to connect to what is true for us, to our desires, to our resistance, despite what we feel ‘should’ be true, based on what is working for others. If you find that this exercise is not resonating with you use it as an opportunity to practice self-kindness, to listen to what is true for you at the moment. Keep the exercise in your arsenal of tools, you may draw on the practice at another time when it resonates for you.

Attuning Practice: Reinforcing Emotional Safety within the Inner World
When we injure ourselves, we instinctively use touch to soothe the wounded area. Similarly, we can use touch to shift and transmute emotional pain in the body. Touch interrupts the stress response and shakes us free from the thought patterns that continue to activate the sympathetic nervous system (flight, flight, or freeze). Using touch helps us distinguish between the boundaries of our container and external influences. It comforts and empowers us when dealing with high stimulus and threatening environments.

Like the practice above, placing hands on core energy centers and connecting to the sensations between them grounds us in our body. It shocks us out of the thinking mode into sensing mode (mindfulness). As we engage with our senses, it reinforces the safety and grounding within the inner world. It enables us to drop deeply into the inner world, clearing out the distractions and debris that prevents us from connecting to our essence. Once connected to essence, we tap into our higher power (or higher self), empowering us to digest and release past trauma, to manage external stimulus, and to align our actions with our calling.

Once we establish our container, it acts as a protective bubble that separates us from the external world. Within these safe boundaries, which we tangibly remind ourselves of, we can soften into the sanctuary within. Using our hands as a physical cue turns our focus from external threats to the safety found within. Within the inner world we are empowered and protected by a power greater than ourselves.

Play with this activity. Try placing your hands on different parts (top of the head, heart, belly). Focus on the sensation between your hands, feel the edges of your container and the safety within. Be patient, wait for a softening, a gentle shift. To practice, try these common variations:

1. Give yourself a hug, providing a firm protective hold, holding the edges of your container. Stay here; breathe here; soften into the hold. Wait until you notice a shift, an ability to drop-in a little deeper. This is especially powerful when uncomfortable emotions spring up. **Holding ourselves is a tangible way to provide self-soothing, enabling emotions to come and go as passing stimuli as opposed to a threatening stressor.** Allowing thoughts and emotions to come and go, versus trying to avoid or resist them, enables us to mindfully step back (to observe, not to avoid) from threatening feelings, preventing us from getting hijacked by the fight, flight, or freeze response.

2. Place a hand on your forehead and another on your heart, whichever hand variation feels most natural. Stay here; breathe here; soften into the hold. Wait until you notice a shift, dropping in a little deeper. **This variation is a good way to take a break from difficult emotions that can feel**
stuck in the belly. Focus on breathing into the headspace, using touch to underscore the experience, and out of the heart space (or vice versa). Feel the sensation of your hands and the feeling of the body under them. Feel the energetic sensations between the two hands.

3. Place a hand on your heart and another hand on your belly. Sense your emotional core (for many this is in the belly) and the sensations (not emotions and thoughts) between your belly and your heart center. If helpful, use your breath to further ground you. Breathing deeply into your belly, fully expanding it, imagining it cleansing every single cell, moving out the old and bringing in the new. Bring the air up to your heart, exhale out the old air, representing old trauma and related baggage you are ready to let go of. As the breath passes through your heart, your healing center, you transmute the old defenses to light and love, exhaling them out into the world. Imagining and holding the heart as a cleansing filter is a healing posture, excellent for digesting and releasing intense and enduring emotions/trauma. This is a good practice to do incrementally. Take it slow. Move your hands back to the self-hug when you need extra comfort or the forehead/heart variation when you need to move your focus away from the belly.

Soothing with Optimism

“If you don't like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude” (Maya Angelou).

Caregiving work is riddled with events that bring up ethical and or moral dissonance. Most people come to caregiving professions because they want to help others. Feeling unable to do what work sets up serious internal conflict in us. We need to either resolve this dissonance or optimistically re-orient ourselves. Otherwise, we will gravitate toward pessimism and hostility. For example, in a recent qualitative study (Dames, 2018) with novice caregivers, Candice reflected on her dissonance stating, “we push people out the door because the hospital is exploding…knowing they will fall and come right back…the guilt for me is a product of an overwhelmed system.” Similarly, Mary stated, “there is just such a general lack of resources. It can feel like sometimes there is just nothing you can do for them.” (Mary)

In the typical human brain, there is a heavy negative bias, meaning that negative events have a far greater emotional impact on us than positive ones, and that negative events linger longer in our memory than positive ones. This negative bias is significantly higher for those who are struggling with depression (Gollan, Hoxha, Hunnicutt-Ferguson, Norris, Rosebrock, Sankin, & Cacioppo, 2016). While negative bias was helpful in keeping us safe in primitive times, it is not so helpful in our modern everyday lives. Becoming more optimistic requires a conscious effort to be mindful when positive events occur, to bring our attention to the positive feelings that result; taking a moment to breathe it in and relish in them. With practice, we can train our brains to pick up on, even look for, the positive aspects of our day, which counter balances our negative bias.

By practicing mindfulness, we are more likely to notice the positive parts of the day such as breathing in the bright blue sky as we look up from our desk or hearing a bird’s song as we walk from our car to our house. Once we notice the positive, if we take a few moments to attend to it, acknowledge and breath into the way it is making us feel, we are training our brains to focus on the positive rather than fixate on the negative.

Optimistic individuals habitually reappraise workplace stimuli in a positive light and identify opportunities within challenges. This tendency toward optimism is significant in our resilience against many chronic stress and related chronic mental health ailments (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010). Strategic
optimism, where there is a degree of non-attachment and self-awareness, is born out of and contributes to a mindset of abundance as opposed to a mindset of fear and scarcity.

"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us" (Helen Keller, 1929)

While a tendency toward optimism has more well-being benefits than a tendency toward pessimism, sometimes using pessimism to make a change is more important that accepting situation as it is and re-orienting ourselves around it. In other words, taking a step back to critically appraise if there is something that can be changed is important; if so, take the steps to change it, if not, accept it and optimistically re-orient yourself. This critical appraisal of events that are causing us discomfort, which may lead to pessimism, enables us to assess the stressor and to determine if we can make a change to remove it. If we apply optimism in every situation, without this objective assessment, it can prevent us from making beneficial changes. To illustrate this point in the research, Troy (2015) showed a significant relationship between stress, context, and whether we tend toward optimism or positive re-orientation (Troy, 2015). If workplace stress is uncontrollable, where you cannot change the thing or event triggering the stress, employing optimism is the most effective skill to use (Troy, Shallcross, & Mauss, 2010). However, if you can control the stressor or change the context to resolve it, then it is more helpful to employ your self-efficacy to change the context, rather than to positively re-orient your emotions about it (Troy et al., 2010).

For this curriculum, self-efficacy is the confidence and resulting ability to achieve our goals. Context and self-efficacy (a component of sense of coherence) determine our ability to manage stressors. In the tree metaphor, the workplace context is the weather, self-efficacy is a root factor we can develop to buffer us from feeling threatened by the weather. When we improve our sense of coherence, we are more likely to make changes when we can, and if things cannot be changed, to accept and positively re-orient ourselves. The Serenity prayer reflects this sentiment:

God, give us the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, the courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other (Sifton, 1998).

Attuning Practice: Assessing our Optimistic Tendancy
By reflecting on personal experiences, there is an opportunity to develop awareness and acceptance of unique belief systems, values, and resources and/or barriers that impact the ability to practice self-compassion and engage in thriving. Self-awareness is a component of mindfulness. Developing a more natural tendency toward optimism promotes an ability to take credit when things go well, which boosts self-efficacy and confidence. Being aware of mistakes and determining where we can make improvements for future events is important; but, falling into self-destructive thought patterns over our mistakes prevents us from seeing the situation objectively and from confidently and creatively making positive changes.

亿吨 Optimism Self-Quiz: How optimistic are you? Write your response as (a) or (b).

1. You get a flower bouquet from a patient with a card that praises you and your ability to deliver high quality care. You think:
   a. I must have been having a good day that day.
   b. Wow, I must be good at making people feel comfortable and cared for.

2. While you are walking to work you see a $10 bill on the sidewalk. You look around and see no one. You think:
   a. What a lucky day!
b. Awesome! There are perks when you are a person that notices all the details.

3. They launched a new electronic charting system at work, it seems to be taking you far longer to understand and efficiently use than some of your colleagues. You think:
   a. My brain cannot do this, I will fall behind and then what?
   b. I am not used to doing things this way, I will get it eventually, I just need to keep at it and it will come.

4. You started using the stairs at work and yesterday you made quite a few trips up and down them. You are now sore. You think:
   a. I am out of shape.
   b. This new habit is working; I am building up my muscles.

5. You ask a colleague for help and he responds with a short and snappy comment about how he has enough work of his own and he’s not able to take on yours. You think:
   a. People are so rude!
   b. Yikes, he must be having a rough day!

6. On your commute to work you find that traffic is unusually heavy. You realize that you may be late for work. You think:
   a. I’m for sure going to be late! I should have known this would happen. They will think I’m flakey for being late!
   b. I wish there wasn’t so much traffic. It’s not in my control, but I may be late for work, I’ll call and give them a heads up. I’ll start leaving earlier just in case.

7. Your workplace awards you with the employee of the month title. You think:
   a. They must have cycled through most of the other employees. I guess it’s my turn.
   b. Yay, I am a hard worker, it’s nice to be recognized!

8. You get complimented on your outfit. You think:
   a. I must have put myself together well today.
   b. I have good style; it feels good to get complements on it.

9. You planned a lunch and learn for your colleagues. It turned out to be a busy day at work with competing priorities and only a few people attended. You think:
   a. I’m terrible at planning events, what a waste of time, I should have known better.
   b. Well, I didn’t expect things to unfold as they did, but I learned a lot. I’ll do things a little differently next time.

10. You missed your lunch break at work today, which has been happening more than usual. You think:
    a. My time management is terrible, I don’t know if I’ll ever get better at this!
    b. This has been an unusual week at work, I’ve been a little distracted, and it’s been hard to focus on my tasks. Thank goodness this is only temporary!

This quiz provides insight into your tendency to correlate your attributes with positive events (a quality of self-efficacy) and your tendency to practice self-compassion. It also helps you to recognize that negative events are an opportunity to learn as opposed to an event that triggers self-depreciating thoughts. If you found that you primarily chose the (a) answers, you have a tendency to perceive positive events as a product of happenstance and negative events as a reflection of your personal shortcomings. If you chose more (b) responses, you have a tendency to view yourself and your attributes more gracefully and optimistically.

Attuning Practice: What we resist persists, optimistic re-orientation
“When it rains look for rainbows, when it’s dark look for stars” (Oscar Wilde).

Name a few frustrating life events that are not changeable.
What opportunity can you find within this event? For instance, maybe you get anxious when standing in line at the grocery store or getting stuck in traffic, where you might fixate on all the things you have to do or how late you will be. You can’t change the wait time, but you can re-orient your thinking by viewing it as a welcome mental rest in your busy day; a time when you have nothing to do but be present in your body or to relax by focusing on your breathing.

Using emotions and sensations as cues provides an opportunity to examine underlying thoughts, which interrupts negative thought rumination. For instance, feeling discontent or depressed is often a result of ruminating on negative thoughts of the past, which often results in feelings of lack that get us stuck in the victim role. Recognizing these thoughts and feelings, or sensations that result, can be a powerful cue to be mindful. With mindfulness we can step back (non-attachment), gain perspective, and re-orient ourselves.

How might this re-orientation impact your experience of the event?

**Soothing with Gratitude**
Gratitude is appreciating what we have as opposed to focusing on what we do not have. It depends on our humility and expectations and it proliferates when we receive more than we expect or more than we believe we deserve. Studies show a positive correlation between gratitude and happiness (Mahipalan, 2018), joy (Watkins, Emmons, Greaves, & Bell, 2018), sleep quality (Wood, Joseph, Lloyd, & Atkins, 2009), spiritual awareness, improved physical and mental health outcomes (Wood & Maltby, 2009), fulfilling relationships (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006), and stress reduction (Solberg & Segerstrom, 2006).

Practicing gratitude requires attention and noticing the blessings we often take for granted. Directing our attention enables us to re-orient our perceptions and diffuses feelings of entitlement and victimhood. We can try to think positive thoughts, but if they do not align with our emotional state, they often do not shift our trajectory. However, if we can re-orient our feeling state, we are more likely to interrupt the stress response and as a result, re-orient our perspective.

Gratitude is the most powerful way to interrupt negative emotions, enabling positive feelings of gratitude for how far we have come and for the gifts we have right now. Focusing the attention in this way creates habits of gratitude and provides an opportunity to notice and then challenge incompatible thoughts. Some find that writing the things they are thankful for, putting thoughts into words, enables them to deepen this way of being. Ways to re-orient with gratitude include expressing it verbally and in writing, focussing on the roots of our suffering (bringing self-compassion to our wounds) rather than fixating on the symptoms, looking back at how far we have come rather than ruminating on how far we have to go, and learning to savour our pleasures.

**Express Gratitude.** Expressing gratitude to others, even before we feel gratitude is an excellent way to prompt the feeling and to create gracious habits. Using unique terms, other than ‘thank you’, which many of us have grown immune to, are often more meaningful and effective. Much like the loving-kindness exercises described in this book, by choosing to acknowledge the parts of people we are grateful for, we can often accept other parts that previously seemed intolerable.

Additionally, writing what we are thankful for can facilitate a greater ability to optimistically reorient ourselves in such a way that we are more able to digest and integrate the positive and the challenging parts of life, realizing that all things will work out in a reasonable fashion.
Looking at the Roots instead of the Fruits. Often times, we struggle to see the gift in the shadows, which hampers our motivation, especially when suffering is involved, to keep working to retrieve it. A tangible way to re-orient our perspective is to consciously cultivate gratitude amid difficult emotions and in the after we catch ourselves reacting out of incongruence (projecting our shame/suffering onto ourselves and others). Rather than focusing on specific symptoms/behaviours in our lives, with self-compassion and non-attachment (a characteristic of mindfulness), we can dig deeper, identifying the wounded roots from which the symptoms sprung. Focusing too heavily on symptoms only fuels shame, which provokes a desire to distract from or numb the emotional pain, rather than investigate the root issue. While our symptoms may feel like the most important focus, as we yearn to be free of the shame they produce, they are merely an indicator of incongruence, illuminating an opportunity for healing.

Through gratitude we are more likely to recognize the gifts within the fruits/symptoms, enabling us to embrace the healing opportunity. In this way, the shame/suffering we feel can be an important road sign to check in with our roots. It alerts us to incongruence that is far deeper than the impulsive projections and behaviors that result. The emotions provoke a deep longing to be authentic, to reclaim a part of our self we buried long ago. This reclaiming, or getting real about who we are, points us back to our authentic desires, and honors our essence; this is the gift, the pathway to congruence.

Looking back instead of forward. Research shows that people have the tendency to fall into unappreciative thought patterns soon after beneficial events have passed (Mitchell, 2010); but, by looking back, we cultivate gratitude. This re-orientation, looking back instead of forward, pivots us from focusing on the gap of what we have yet to achieve, to gratitude for how far we have come. It prevents us from focusing on what we think we need to attain happiness and buffers us from feelings of entitlement and victimhood.

Finally, using positive, meaningful, and realistic affirmations via short phrases or a repeated mantra is another tool that helps us pivot to a more grateful and optimistic perspective (Lighthall, Gorlick, & Schoeke, 2013). The ability to view both the negative and positive aspects of our life, providing a framework of gratitude and optimism, promotes healing from past wounds. When our inner world shifts from pessimism and victimhood to optimism and gratitude, we are more likely to feel safe, enabling a desire to drop in to digest unresolved traumas and incongruence. “Unexpected capacities emerge, existing relationships once taken for granted become more precious, awareness and insight into what really matters in life is realized, and spiritual senses are heightened” (Emmons & Stern, 2013, p. 853).

Savor fleeting pleasures. The art of savouring correlates with habits of gratitude and is a reflection of the ability to stretch out and immerse in positive moments for as long as possible. Much like savoring a meal by slowing down and taking notice in the fine details, we can savour other moments throughout our day in the same way.

Tips to Cultivate Gratitude

- Each act of kindness and/or gratitude releases dopamine (our brain’s pleasure chemical), habits of kindness and gratitude make for more pleasurable days.
- Act and talk as though you are grateful and often the feelings will meet the occasion.
- Find new ways to express gratitude that extend beyond the token “thank you.” For instance, “I am so grateful for…”, or writing it down via a card or letter.
- Recall one thing you are grateful for each day.
- Before you fall asleep each night, consider as many things as you can that happened that day that you are thankful for.
- Recognizing that much like gift giving, the giver of gratitude often receives even greater benefits than the receiver. Express gratitude in new ways, other than thank you, which research is showing
is less effective than something like, “I am grateful for...” putting it in writing is even more effective for the giver and receiver.

- Cultivate the habit of re-orienting with a glass half full approach, recognizing how much abundance is all around us, and in this way, that we are so fortunate to have water in our cups at all (as many do not).
- Consider your mortality, doing your best to appreciate others as much as possible in the short time we are here.
- Reflect on our connectedness. We are working within and contributing to a large and meaningful picture. From this perspective, even menial parts of our day can be meaningful with this perspective. Viewing the world in this way, enables us to ask for help, as we are all working toward a common cause.

**Strengthening Practice: Cultivating Gratitude by Savoring**

Starting our day from a framework of gratitude re-orient our perspective to notice the positive aspects of our lives. Because humans tend toward a negative bias (Gollan et al., 2016) we must consciously buffer ourselves from feelings of threat by cultivating gratitude and optimism. Doing a gratitude practice in the morning is ideal, perhaps in the gap between awakening and lifting your head from the pillow. It can simply be a counting of your blessings and can occur whenever and however it feels most natural to you. **They key is to cultivate grateful feelings** (an obligatory activity is typically not fruitful as it tends to be disconnected from the heart/senses).

To practice, start by recalling three core attributes or events in your life that you are grateful for (family, friends, job, health, etc.). Then, thinking about three smaller things that you are grateful for (your breakfast, a good night sleep, a favorable evaluation at work, the pleasant conversation you had with your partner last night, etc.). Sit with it, breathe into it, enabling yourself to drop-in, connecting your heart to the exercise.

**Strengthening Practice: Cultivating and Expressing Gratitude for Self**

We all come into this human experience with a specific set of qualities, designed to fulfill a unique and meaningful purpose. Most of us are enculturated to avoid recognizing and articulating our unique gifts and abilities, making it difficult to cultivate an appreciation for them. Avoidance of self-appreciation comes from a fear of being rejected, threatening our primal need for love, acceptance, and to belong. Perhaps we fear we will seem arrogant or that we will be vulnerable to scrutiny and hostility from others. We are far more comfortable pointing out and ruminating on weaknesses, which is further compounded by the human tendency for a negative bias (Gollan et al., 2016). There are two components to self-appreciation. (1) Recognizing our strengths and (2) Sharing and expressing our unique qualities with others; these two components are interdependent. Recognizing our strengths empowers us to be vulnerable and vulnerability is a requirement of authenticity/self-expression.

Recognize your gifts; those unique skills and abilities that come easy for you. Can you articulate a few of these? If you come up with items that seem superficial try going a little deeper, identifying those parts that reflect the essence of who you are and what you value. This work will assist you with developing a calling as you move through the curriculum.

Equally important is recognizing what events, topics, and activities spark your passions. There are many ways to sprinkle in self-appreciation into our daily routine. Can you name a few events, activities, or topics you found yourself engrossed in recently? Again, the answer will provide clues to your unique essence, enabling you to live a calling.
Sprinkle in a few new habits that cultivate an attitude of gratitude and that honor your uniqueness. For example:

- Tap into your inner joy, try subtly smiling as you go throughout your daily routine, notice the impact it has on your perspective and how others respond to you (mirroring effect).
- Instead of saying sorry every time you make a mistake, consider if a sorry is the kindest response. For instance, perhaps you are running late; try focusing on thanking people for waiting, rather than berating yourself for being late.
- When you are running behind on a task, instead of berating yourself for falling behind on a goal, try looking back at how much you have already accomplished.
- When someone complements you, say thank you rather than deflecting it.
- Make a list of what you like about yourself or ways in which your self-expression has impacted others. Keep it in your wallet as a reminder when you feel vulnerable to self-destructive thoughts. When we are authentic, it inspires others to have the courage to be authentic too!
- When inadequacies seem to be especially apparent, remind yourself that we all have strengths and weaknesses, this is a normal part of being human. You are in good company!
- Practice saying no to something you would typically grudgingly agree to. Much like you would a friend; celebrate the courage it took to do so.
- Follow your body’s cues by eating something you desire. Mindfully enjoy the experience and take notice when the flavor wanes (your body’s cue that you’ve had enough). If guilt arises, recognize it as an old thought pattern resulting from an old wound (not a fact), speak kindly to it, and release it.
- Do something you desire as an act of appreciation!

Soothing with Forgiveness

“I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us” (Lamott, 1999).

Forgiveness is the diminishing of the negative feelings that result from feeling we were wronged (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, Graham, & Beach, 2010). When we harbour negative feelings such as anger, resentments, and hostility, it triggers our sympathetic nervous system, which has immediate and chronic impacts on our mental and physical health. When the sympathetic nervous system (stress response) gets chronically triggered, our bodies cannot focus on healing and balance, rather they remain in a high alert state, which takes a toll on us. For instance, each time we inadvertently trigger the stress response, our anxiety increases with an increase in cortisol causing vasoconstriction and increased blood pressure and heart rate, which overtime damages our coronary arteries (Kelly, 2018; Miller, Smith, Turner, Gui-jarro, & Hallet, 1996; VanOyen, Wityliet, Ludwig, Kelly, & Vander Laan, 2001).

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it changes our future as we create a new way to remember, moving from bitterness to love. Forgiveness liberates us from violent events committed to us and by us, breaking us free from re-experiencing the violation over and over in our memories. Forgiveness removes the emotional charge associated with old memories, enabling us to transform our suffering into wisdom.

Forgiveness enables us to release anger and resentment, lowering cortisol/stress levels and reducing the likelihood of a host of health conditions we perpetuate via chronic stress (Kelly, 2018; Worthington,
Finally, forgiveness breaks the victim perpetrator cycle. By forgiving ourselves/others, we let go of resentments, which sets us free from feeling like a perpetual victim. When we feel victimized by others, we continually recount the violation done to us, feeling is like it just occurred. When we victimize ourselves, we engage in self-destructive thoughts and behaviors, acting as the perpetrator and the victim. Forgiveness empowers us to change what we can about the situation. Forgiveness/letting go is about accepting what WAS, that which we cannot change, and changing what we can by re-orienting ourselves. Stepping out of the victim role is changing what we can, and it is through forgiveness, that we do so. By owning our transgressions (how our projections harm others), we prevent ourselves from perpetrating suffering in others and release the shame associated with acting out incongruent ways of being. To be clear, forgiveness is often a multi-step process. Each time a thought or emotion arises from the victim orientation (fixating on the violation or self-destructive thoughts/act), we must mindfully re-orient ourselves. With each re-orientation, we forgive/let go a little more until one day we find it has left us completely.

“Forget yourself for not knowing what you didn’t know before you learned it” (Maya Angelou).

Clearing Practice: Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves, and Making Amends

Forgiving self and others. It is exhausting to carry the burden of resentment. When others threaten our ability to meet our basic human needs, we feel victimized. Whether we were victims is not the point, identifying with the role and living as a victim is the point. Playing the part of a victim disempowers us (low sense of coherence) and dampens our ability to act congruently because we are prone to getting distracted by the intense need to react by fighting (triggering self and other destructive thoughts and behaviors), fleeing (avoiding/numbing our emotions), or freezing (stuck in thought rumination, unable to connect to our 'real' self). Forgiving others releases us from the victim role. Forgiving others has many other benefits too, such as better emotional health (resentment burns emotional energy stores), healthier relationships, and improved conflict resolution skills. Being willing to recognize when we are carrying resentments demonstrates a willingness to begin to let them go. Try not to get hung up on next steps. If your higher power (or higher self) calls you to take another step you will be provided with all the wisdom, courage, and resources necessary to do so.

Drop in, perhaps place a hand on your heart, and do some heart breathing. Trust your higher power (or higher self) will do the work; your only job is to respond by noting what bubbles up.

While we may not forget our mistakes or the mistakes of others, forgiveness is about deciding to stop being a prisoner of the past. In this exercise, we re-orient ourselves to the transgressions of the past. Use the lessons of the past to make you wiser, rather than as a life sentence of suffering.

Make a list of all the people who harmed you. Harm occurs when our basic needs go unmet. Perhaps you felt rejected, violated (physically, sexually, or emotionally), you felt unsafe, excluded, put down, etc. Don’t forget to include yourself. Don’t hold back at this point; get them all down on paper; let it flow.

Owning our Projections/Transgressions. When it comes to conflict, it is often more difficult to see our missteps than seeing the transgressions of others. Make a list of all of those whom you have harmed, including yourself. Some of the most intense resentments we carry against others are so powerful because they are projections/reminders of our past incongruent behaviors that we are yet to make amends for. At this point, shame often creeps in. Remind yourself, these feelings are a normal part of being human (emerging from areas of incongruence still in need of healing). We are all in the same boat on this journey toward congruence. It is much easier to name all the ways someone victimized us than to acknowledge when we have been the perpetrator. Practice loving-kindness here. Speak kindly to the fears/shame that
bubble up, step back from them (non-attachment is key) and speak to them as you would a child or a good friend. This work takes courage, self-compassion, and encouragement!

Making Amends. Stop! Before you skip this exercise altogether, please hear me out. Going through this exercise is not locking you into confessions and apologies. Just being willing to effort through the process, owning your part, is enough. A willingness to acknowledge our part is sometimes enough, all that we are called to do to release the shame associated with our actions. If we are called to make more formal amends to someone, our higher power (or higher self) will reveal that in time and when that happens, we will be ready. We will have all the wisdom, courage, and resources to do so.

Responsibility or response-ability for our side of the street is how we release pent up shame (a product behaving in ways incongruent with our values/essence). Please take comfort in the fact that we all live incongruently at times, this is part of being human; you are not alone. When we do not respond after behaving incongruently (not aligned with our values/essence), hurting ourselves and/or others, shame wells up inside us. As it wells, we become less willing to go inside ourselves, it is too painful to be with the shame, and we turn to external substances and activities to soothe ourselves. Shame spills over into our relationships as it wells up and spills over onto others (horizontal violence). Often, others also play a part in conflicts, but that is not in our control. What is in our control is the condition of our side of the street. Making amends is only our side of the equation, taking stewardship of our side of the street; this enables us to be congruent.

This exercise is difficult! This is an excellent time to build our self-compassion muscles. Self-compassion is an antidote to shame, preventing us from compounding shame by criticizing ourselves for past behavior. We all make mistakes; this is part of being human! It's not about never making mistakes, it is about doing our best to make amends when we are called to do so.

Drop in and begin your list. Consider the events in your life where you acted incongruently. Perhaps you did or said something that harmed another, or you acted in ways incongruent with your core values. The events we feel the most shame over will easily come to mind. While this process can feel like a haunting, it is a good thing. Our spirit is letting us know there is a wound in need of healing.

Let yourself write freely, trust that your higher power (or higher self) will do the work. When your list is complete, step back (non-attachment from the emotions) and take a few cleansing deep breaths. Breathe in mercy and breathe out compassion. For extra comfort, enabling us to let emotions come rather than resisting them, put a hand on your heart or hold your hands together like you're holding a friend's hand. You deserve to be celebrated and comforted for doing this difficult work! Recognizing that this exercise will often uncover intense emotions/trauma, refer to the tips for dealing with uncomfortable emotions and trauma in Part IV.

Well done!! You completed your lists. Take some time to let your emotions settle. Just recognizing past hurts and acknowledging how we have hurt others is powerful healing work. As for next steps, you can trust that if and when the time comes to make amends the yearning and opportunity will present itself. Many people find that writing a letter to the person they harmed is a valuable process, whether it gets sent is often beside the point. For those we are aiming to forgive, often times just writing the letter is enough. We do not want to harm others in our process. We can send the letter in other ways such as burning it (transmuting to light), drowning it (purifying), and/or burying it (giving back to the earth for healing). The next steps are unique to each person. Trust the process. If healing requires a formal action, your higher power (or higher self) will show you the way and provide the necessary resources to do so.

Clearing Practice: Living a Life of Letting Go

Forgiveness is understanding that the past is an unchangeable and essential part of our journey toward wholeness.
Assessing where we are at: consider your own habits of holding onto and letting go of anger, resentments, and hostility. How does it impact you on a day-to-day basis? How often do you ruminate on these feelings? What emotions and/or physical symptoms result? As uncomfortable emotions arise in these reflective moments, use the opportunity to flex your self-compassion muscles, speaking and soothing with words of grace, mercy, and unconditional positive regard for self.

The process of letting go: Bring a person to mind that you are holding feelings of anger/resentment/hostility toward. Perhaps this person is you. Imagine them sitting in front of you. Connect to them, reminding yourself that they too have suffered, have experienced pain, and that this pain and suffering is likely at the roots of their offensive behaviors (projecting their suffering onto others). Breathe in mercy on the inhale, perhaps imagining it flow into you as a cleansing white light, and on the exhale, extend compassion and empathy to them. Practice this breathing until you feel a shift, perhaps noticing a subtle release or a space between you and the resentment you have been holding onto. After the shift, however subtle, look beyond their pain and suffering, look for their beauty, continuing to send them empathy and compassion.

Forgiveness, the process of letting go of our negative emotions toward another, is not forgetting. There are situations and relationships that require us to walk away. In these situations, this walking away is an act of wisdom and self-compassion. Letting go of the negative emotions enables us to objectively (tapping into our inner knowing) determine the best way forward.

Letter writing and burning. Putting thoughts into written word enables you to dig deeper, uncovering wounds and resentments that are difficult to access. Writing can facilitate a digestion and integration process that promotes understanding and meaning-making. When using writing in this way, it is important to drop in, moving from the thinking mind to the sensing mind, out of your head and into your heart. Let your emotions flow, writing freely, without filters and without judgment. Write until there is nothing left to write. Once your letter is complete find a safe space where you can burn it. Watch it burn; as it turns to ash, imagine yourself letting it go; let the fire refine you, cleanse you, free you. As you release it, bring something (just one word) new into the void it left behind; breathing in ______________ (love, peace, joy, Spirit, compassion, etc.). When complete, take time to sit, to breathe, to grieve, whatever feels necessary. This time of sitting after you complete a practice is essential to release/grieve the old and integrate the new.

Letting go is a continuous practice, working on one layer at a time. Your higher power (or higher self) will never give you more than you can handle. Re-orient yourself; emotions are not threats, they are cues to get our attention, reminding us of a wound ready for healing. When you notice yourself ruminating in anger or resentment, it is time to remove another layer.

The Journey Ahead
In Part VII, we came to know how to nourish and deepen our roots by re-parenting the parts of ourselves that were previously left in the shadows. We are practicing loving-kindness, or as described above, re-orienting ourselves to new compassionate ways of thinking and being; to do this, we employ strategic optimism, gratitude, and forgiveness practices. Mindfulness provides a space, which enables the objectivity required to investigate the thoughts, events, and environments that are causing us stress. When we can, we make changes, or if we cannot make changes, we accept what is and embrace a spirit of gratitude and optimism to change ourselves; to do this, we can:
• Re-parent via loving-kindness practices
• Re-orient via gratitude/compassion practices, when to use optimistic re-appraisal
• Re-solving via forgiveness practice

In Part VIII, we delve deeper into the inner world, clearing and cleaning unresolved trauma, making space for a sanctuary that promotes self-soothing.
PART VIII: Trauma: The unresolved weather of the past

The wounds we cannot see are often far deeper and more painful than those we can.

While there has been an increased focus on trauma informed care, recognizing that trauma is an influential part of the patient experience, we as care providers experience and carry trauma too. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after any stressful event beyond our normal threshold. Common indicators of PTSD, among those who are not already challenged with similar symptoms related to clinical depression are: (1) feeling haunted by memories of the event or events, (2) having problems in personal relationships, and (3) problems controlling emotions (Keane, Caddell, & Taylor, 1988). Events which can cause PTSD are often related to incidents involving acts of violence, natural or man-caused disasters, and accidents (NIMH, 2018). Seventy percent of people have experienced at least one traumatic event and up to 20% of those people will go onto develop PTSD as a result (PTSD United, 2018). As for caregivers, in some studies, more than half of the providers working in high acuity settings screen positive for PTSD (Iranmanesh, Tirgari, & Bardsiri, 2013; Manitoba Nursing Union, 2015).

Painful memories and intense emotions from unresolved traumatic events will often emerge as we drop into the inner world. Part of the process of developing a habit of relating to the inner world, forming an inner sanctuary, is digesting the old traumas we previously could not deal with. When we process and digest trauma, we transform it, taking the parts that nurture us and making it a part of ourselves and let go of what is not serving us. Over time, a sense of emotional safety softens us, making us ready to process and resolve past traumas. Feelings of safety, and the uncovering of unprocessed and undigested events is a good sign! The rise of the emotion is a signal you are ready to digest the event and resulting emotions of the past, despite our initial fears to do so. Awareness of the emotion and allowing it to flow in and linger for as long as it needs to, is a necessary step toward healing. While you may find you can digest these memories on your own, if too intense, having the support of a trained professional can help you move through and past the trauma.

Managing Emotions and Resolving Trauma

When our emotions are so overwhelming, we don’t feel that we can step back, getting an objective perspective from a trusted friend or a professional can help us to keep our emotions in perspective. However, with practice, we can provide this same form of compassion and objectivity to ourselves, enabling dissonance to rise up as it needs to, be digested, and released. It takes time to develop these skills, but in the meantime, having a compassionate ear can be immensely helpful to work through emotions, especially shame, and past trauma that we aren’t yet able to objectively manage ourselves. Reaching out for help is a great example of exercising self-compassion.

A common form of trauma that occurs among caregivers is vicarious trauma. The term vicarious trauma was originally coined in the 1990’s (McCann & Pearlman, 1990) and describes the impact of repeated exposure to accounts of traumatic events. When unresolved, it can affect our identity and beliefs, leading to cynicism and despair (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Those more prone to over identifying with other’s emotions, beyond empathetic engagement, are especially vulnerable to vicarious trauma. Mindfulness, which interweaves with sense of coherence (Grevenstein, Aguilar-Raab, & Bluemke, 2018), buffers us from overidentifying with the experience of others, thereby preventing vicarious trauma. When we can step back from the emotions, others’ and our own, we are more able to accept the emotions as messages to investigation, not threatening facts. Every emotion is an opportunity for healing, enabling us to care for old wounds, to practice self-compassion, and a cue to re-orient ourselves when helpful. What we can feel we can heal (Neff, 2018)
**Digging into Gut Reactions to get to the Beliefs Beneath**

You know that feeling when someone says something to you, and you have a physical reaction that feels out of proportion to the situation? Maybe suddenly feeling hot in the face, or punched in the gut? Or otherwise more nebulous like a knot in your stomach or a tense unease? These are all signs we are feeling threatened, whether or not our physical or emotional safety is truly at risk. The whole, often subconscious, process of becoming triggered can happen in less than a second; leaving us to time in the moment to objectively question whether our assessment of the danger is accurate. When events and related thoughts trigger old belief systems, we get hijacked by a gut reaction, which prevents us from acting from an informed state of mind.

Whether we perceive something to be threatening is based on the belief system we use to interpret it. Our belief systems reflect what we *actually* believe, not the slogans or mantras we recite to ourselves and others. Our underlying beliefs are the deeply rooted thought programs we automatically (without conscious consent) use to interpret our sensations. For the most part, previous events in our lives, especially in our formative years, form our belief systems about what stimulus (coming from the inner or outer world) is threatening. Sense of coherence results from the belief that we have the necessary resources to manage whatever life tosses our way, in this way our ability to navigate life with equanimity and confidence depends on our underlying beliefs about ourselves and the way the world operates.

Cultivating curiosity through mindfulness is the key to uncovering our belief systems. To get to the belief systems that are causing sensations/stimuli to feel threatening we must first learn to step back from them, which we can learn through mindfulness practices. By stepping back from the sensations that arise, we prevent ourselves from identifying with them. With presence and non-attachment, you can uncover your belief systems by asking. By stepping back, we can converse with the sensation, which interrupts the automatic habit of interpreting it through the lens of old belief systems. What does conversing look like? It is speaking to the sensation like a child or a close friend. Ask questions and take the time to wait for the answers.

For example, you might ask:

*I see that sensation is causing discomfort. I see your suffering. Can you describe the feeling? Is that fear? Or shame? What are you afraid of? What does this remind you of? How is this situation the same and how is it different?*

Talking to the emotions and thoughts that arise like you would a child or a close friend promotes self-compassion. However, the key is, you must feel safe enough to express what feels forbidden. If we don’t feel safe enough to say the forbidden thing, we will not get to the belief system underneath. If we don’t get to the belief system underneath, we cannot challenge it. Talk to yourself with unconditional positive regard, much like you would a child who has unhealed trauma. Create a safe space:

*I can see this is painful. You are safe with me. You can talk freely. I know it is difficult, but I am here for you now. I am your safe space. Tell me about what happened to you that is causing this fear? Tell me what you are fear will happen? What need of yours is feeling threatened (belonging, self-esteem, love, acceptance, safety, etc.)? I am so sorry you are suffering. I am so sorry this need went unmet before, that must have been difficult. I am here for you now, tell me about your fears, tell me about your shame. I am here. You are safe.*

Eventually, as you move from the tip of the iceberg, melting/healing one layer at a time, you will expose the belief system underneath. With mindfulness, you can cultivate curiosity, enabling you to
objectively investigate the thoughts and sensations arising from your belief systems. Sometimes they can be obscure, requiring you to dig deep, but eventually, insight will strike and the root, the belief system underlying thoughts, feelings, and the related reactive behaviours will be exposed. It is here, coming from an objective place, that you can challenge the old belief system and re-orient (re-parent) yourself. If you are having strong physical responses, remember to manage your biology, getting your cortisol (stress hormone) levels down is imperative. Find a cortisol lowering tool (examples provided earlier in the curriculum) and put it to work when you are feeling hijacked by your nervous system, making the sensations too strong to sit with or too difficult to step back from.

**False Evidence Appearing Real (F.E.A.R)**

Memorizing the acronym for the nature of F.E.A.R. or False Evidences Appearing Real reminds us of the subjective reality of fear. Unresolved trauma often triggers fear and anxiety, distorting events. With mindfulness we can step back from fear and see more clearly. This process, stepping back to gain objectivity, is not an act of resistance, rather, it is an allowing, even a welcoming of it. Our perception or orientation about the fear changes. The change in perception enables us to take in the message that there is something that needs healing or re-orientation; we can then let the related thoughts and emotions present themselves clearly, process them, digest them, and let them go. On the other hand, when we resist fear, we miss the opportunity to heal the old traumas that often haunt us, bubbling up to remind us they are there, waiting for healing. The ‘Guest House’ provides insight into how we can re-orient ourselves when emotions arise, enabling us to welcome them as guests as opposed to overly identifying with them:

**The Guest House**

*This being human is a guest house.*
*Every morning a new arrival. A joy, a depression, a meanness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.*
*Welcome and entertain them all! Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably. He may be clearing you out for some new delight.*
*The dark thought, the shame, the malice. meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.*
*Be grateful for whatever comes. because each has been sent as a guide from beyond. (Jellaludin & Barks, 1997)*

**Nature as Healer, Nature as Teacher**

Nature is a living example of how chaos, order, life, and even death intermingle, resulting in a raw form of beauty that enchants and mystifies us. We, as a part of nature, are also a mix of order and chaos, creating and adapting every moment. As we come to accept that nature is beautiful because of its intricate blend of chaos and order, we can also come to terms with, accept, and even celebrate the same complexities in our ‘real’ selves. The research shows that forest bathing (discussed in Part IV), which occurs when we immerse in nature for extended periods of time, reduces anxiety, depression, and anger, and increases vigor and the
immune system up to 30 days after the immersion experience (Li, 2010; Park, Tsunetsugu, Kasetani, Hirano, Kagawa, & Sato, 2007). Just being exposed to nature can lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Beyer, Kaltenbach, Szabo, Bogar, Nieto, & Malecki, 2014).

**Attuning Practice: Learning from Nature to Embrace Order and Chaos**

Much of this book is about connecting with self, acting as a building block to enable a greater ability to connect to others and to nature. For some, the process may happen in reverse, whereby a connection to others or to nature better enables them to connect more deeply with themselves. There is no right way, as we unique in personality, cultural contexts, upbringing, and experiences that inform our sense of coherence and congruence. The below nature focussed meditations provide an ability to attune to our unique needs for an inner balance of both order and chaos. Immersing and observing nature helps us to make peace with our need for order, enabling us to ground in order AND surrender and accept the chaos that provides a sense of anticipation, adventure, and mystery in life. Nature is a perfect balance of order and chaos, death and life. When we resonate and find peace within nature, we attune to the same symbiotic qualities within ourselves.

Make yourself comfortable, sitting or lying down with your eyes closed. Take a few cleansing breaths by breathing in deeply through your nose and emptying your lungs fully as you exhale through your mouth. Be present to whatever arises whether inner or outer being careful not to resist or try to change anything. After you ground yourself in the present moment, bring your attention to your surroundings. Feel the air on your skin, noticing the temperature and the feel of air as it moves around you. Listen to the sounds of the trees, the birds, running water and other elements that surround you. Tune into the symphony of sounds that ebb and flow, noticing when a new sound emerges, changes, and then disappears. Take in the smells of nature, cultivating a sense of curiosity with the varying scents that emerge. Practice noticing each sounds, smell, and sensation without labeling it. Observe each one with a sense of curiosity and then let it fall into the background as you move your focus to another element. When your mind wanders, continue building your concentration by bringing it back to the current moment.

Now open your eyes and continue the meditation, which you can now do standing or walking. Turn your focus to the sight of nature, taking in the details of the trees, noticing movement around you among the birds, the how the branches of the trees gently move with the wind, and other elements of the weather. Cultivate a new sense of inquiry as you pay attention to details you might otherwise gloss over. Practice seeing things for the first time, promoting a non-attachment and openness by letting go of labels and the tendency to attach meaning to it.

**Medicinal and Holistic Management of Anxiety and Depression**

Between unresolved trauma and biological imbalances, dropping into the inner space to self-soothe can be too painful, making it difficult, and for some even impossible, without medical intervention. We all have unique needs. Some people will resolve much of their anxiety and depression by resolving past trauma, using cortisol lowering tools, and engaging in mindfulness, while others will need something more to drop in, to self-sooth. There is no shame in taking medication. In fact, many will find that when they find a medication that works for them, they wonder how they have survived so long without it. Canadian data is limited but according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (Pratt, Brody, & Gu, 2017), 17% of Americans between the ages of 40-59 years and 19% of people over 60 use anti-depressants to treat symptoms stemming from anxiety and depression. Females are more likely to take antidepressants than males. To be clear, medications, including herbs and the building blocks that enable us to produce important chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, are not the focus of this curriculum, but they are additional and often necessary tools to manage biology and emotions, enabling a greater ability to self-
soothe. For these reasons, medications are worth mentioning. Besides traditional pharmaceuticals, plant-based remedies are emerging in the research as beneficial with less side effects. Key amino acids necessary to support the production and balance of serotonin (associated with happiness/contentment) and dopamine (associated with pleasure), and botanicals,andrenergics, and nootropics, which can reduce the production and management of stress hormones. Another emerging example of a natural remedy is the use of Cannabidiol (CBD), a non-psychoactive component of hemp and marijuana, working for many to reduce the symptoms associated with anxiety and depression (Corroon, James, Mischley, & Sexton, 2017; Soares & Campos, 2017; Zuardi, Rodrigues, Silva, Bernardo, Jaime, Hallak, Guimaraes, & Jose, 2017). Ultimately, if we are committed to thriving, we must be open to our unique needs, removing barriers in whatever way we can; doing so, is another way to practice self-compassion.

**Psychedelics**

Research results in mental health treatment are bringing psychedelics front and center in western medicine. While still controversial and prohibited in many areas, with research trends moving as they are, we will likely see more acceptance of their therapeutic use, as tools to retrieve and digest unresolved trauma, and an agent that provides neuroprotection and regeneration (Frecska, Bokor, & Winkelman, 2016).

Since the lifting of prohibitions on the research of psychedelics, study results suggest that in the appropriate set and setting, they may play a significant role to integrate traumatic experiences, showing significant success in resolving post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), addictions, anxiety, and treatment resistant depression. For example, in South America and Africa, ayahuasca and iboga are psychoactive plant medicines with biochemical and neurological benefits that are outperforming the traditional pharmaceutical remedies to treat addiction and depression (Belgers, Leenaars, Homberg, Ritskes-Hoitinga, Schellekens, & Hooijmans, 2016; Palhano-Fontes, Barreto, Onias, Andrade, Novaes, Pessoa, …& Aruaujo, 2018; Sanches, de Lima Osorio, Dos Santos, Macedo, Maia-de-Oliveira, Wichert-Ana, & Hallak, 2016). Studies using psilocybin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), and Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) are showing significant regenerative properties, improving neuroplasticity, resulting in remarkable improvements, even complete resolution of depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Griffiths et al, 2016; Ly et al., 2018; Slomski, 2018; Williams & Leins, 2016).

Besides mental health treatment, research is showing that the hallucinogenic properties of psychedelics, when used in the appropriate set and setting, can promote an ability to confront innermost fears, enabling people to digest unresolved dissonance from the past (Frecska, Bokor, & Winkelman, 2016). When used with healing intention, these psychedelics can promote a benevolent connection to the inner world, where people can experience a sense of unconditional positive regard. For many who have never felt wholly accepted and loved, this can be empower people to embrace previously forbidden parts of themselves, resulting in greater congruence.

Viewing past trauma, pain, regrets, and fractured relationships through this loving lens, aids in the ability to digest and transmute regret and shame with grace and forgiveness. As the defensive self (the ego) moves into the background, we can view our past transgressions or suffering we endured by hand of others more objectively. With objectivity, we are more able to see that the harm done by others is often a projection of their hurt and suffering. What felt malicious before, feels less personal, shaking us free from feeling like a victim and fueling compassion for those who hurt us.

When used with a therapeutic intention, psychedelics enable us to see we ARE whole and that rather than needing to be fixed, we only need to remember our wholeness, our worthiness, and then learn and practice living out of that remembrance. Psychedelics can lift the veil of the ego enabling us to see ourselves and others in a positive, loving, and gracious way. Breeding unconditional positive regard and objectivity enables us to accept and digest those parts of ourselves that felt unacceptable and unpalatable.
The spirit comes to the forefront while the ego and the labels of this world fall into the background. This objectivity fuels shifts (ah ha moments) that were otherwise unreachable. Shifting to see things as they are, with Spirit at the forefront, enables us to develop trust in a larger mystical/spiritual plan, enabling us to feel held in the spiritual world, despite the external events that swirl around us.

Finally, as becoming clear in recent research, medicinal use of psychedelics can take us deeper than we could otherwise go, re-introduce us to the parts of ourselves that we left in the shadows, and to resolve and release shame that can otherwise be hard to access. All of these medicinal qualities promote deeper roots through inner and outer connection and an ability to cultivate the unconditional positive regard necessary to heal past trauma and incongruence.

**Working with Trauma: Additional Strategies**

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<th>With permission to use, these adapted tools from Schmidt and Miller (2004) help us to step back, enabling objectivity, to interrupt negative thought rumination, and from using activities and substances to distract and dissociate (external soothing).</th>
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| **The body and breath** are anchors for awareness that can be returned to again and again. Mindfulness of the breath is especially useful for trauma survivors, who tend to hold their breath as a way of not connecting with the present moment. Holding the breath is an unconscious response to anxiety and may also be part of the process of dissociating from the experience.

Body awareness needs to begin gradually. One way to start is by observing the body during times when it feels comfortable. One woman found that the only safe place in her body was her hands, and she would mindfully watch every sensation in each hand for hours at a time. Feeling comfort is a simple thing that trauma survivors often overlook—or sometimes aren’t even aware can exist. These practices can be done for five minutes in bed, right before sleep: Notice the sensation of gravity. Feel the weight of your body on the bed. How does gravity feel?

Scan your body for a place that feels relaxed and even a little bit comfortable. Perhaps it is a finger, a toe, or somewhere deep in your body. Focus on that place. Notice what “comfortable” feels like. See if you can describe it. |
| **Reverse-Warrior Teachings**

People with trauma histories often have a tendency to push themselves to extremes; they are more than willing to stay up all night, fast for days, or sit for many hours without moving. Unfortunately, practices that override the body’s natural signals of discomfort can end up creating further trauma. One therapist explains, “The way trauma folks survived was that they taught themselves to persevere and to be driven. It’s what they learned worked. They didn’t learn about kindness to themselves or their internal signals. There wasn’t the sense that internal signals could be a support or were worth trusting. It takes survivors a long time to come to listen to internal, intuitive messages and believe them.” One practitioner discovered, “The difficulty with trauma as it unfolded was how compelling the story was and how I was driven by the thought, ‘I’m going to work through this.’ I had to watch this combination of fascination and drivenness and remind myself to back off.”

Instead, trauma survivors will be best served from a self-compassionate approach:

- Practice for shorter periods of time.
- Get plenty of sleep and eat regularly.
- Focus on balance and equanimity rather than effort and progress.
- Build in breaks and remember that it’s not a weakness to be gradual. |
Working with trauma is like having two jobs: You’re doing the practice of meditation and the practice of healing at the same time. In this regard, the meditative focus needs to be on simple, small steps. One therapist notes: “Trauma survivors always feel they are not working hard enough and that’s why they are stuck. But this isn’t true. It’s okay to relax and stop constantly trying to change.”

**Listening instead of dissociating**
The core practice in healing trauma is learning how to feel strong emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them. During meditation practice, survivors often respond to overwhelming emotions by dissociating, a relic of the psychological defense they used to remove their awareness from the trauma while it was occurring. One meditator described dissociation this way: “My mind enters a state outside my body, captive in some dimension where it is at least safe and alive, yet also powerless and terrified. To settle on the breath is impossible. To get up or move in any way is impossible. After some time, my mind returns enough so that I am able to pull my blanket around me, draw my knees up, and just sit.”

How does a meditator learn to feel strong emotions and bodily sensations without dissociating from them?

When a difficult emotion, sensation, or memory arises, learn to touch up against the pain in small increments. To do this, bring your attention to a place in your body that feels comfortable or neutral (see “Awareness of Body and Breath,” above). Feel this comfortable place for a few minutes. Then slowly move the attention to the difficult emotion. Feel that for a minute, then move back to the comfortable place again. Keep moving the attention patiently back and forth between these two areas. This gradual re-experiencing can modulate the intensity of the emotion and create a sense of mastery over the feeling.

Train the mind to listen to the body with tenderness and intimacy. Throughout the day, when you are engaged in activities, check in with your body, asking yourself, “Does my body like this or not? What does my body want? Is it okay to keep going, or do I need to stop now?”

**Noticing “Trauma-Mind”**
One of the characteristics of severe trauma is that past emotions and experiences invade the present and become overwhelming. A Vietnam veteran recalls, “When the memories hit, they literally knocked me off my cushion. Through meditation, I eventually found balance with them.”

The practice of mindfulness develops the ability to observe these memories in a way that facilitates equanimity and balance by learning that all thoughts come and go.

Notice ‘trauma mind,’ the habit of always looking over one’s shoulder, expecting the worst to happen. When fearful memories arise, ask yourself: “Am I okay in this moment? And this moment?” Remember, you have resources and choices now. Try breathing in compassion and breathing out fear.

Take a day to observe positive emotions as they occur. When did you feel joy today? Curiosity? Humor? Because healing from trauma can involve repeated focus on difficult emotions, it’s important to train the mind to notice the positive emotions that exist.

Try micro-labeling stressful thoughts and feelings: When they arise, meticulously note your reactions as “thinking,” “imagining,” “fear,” and so on.

Question self-judgments and negative beliefs: “Can I absolutely know this is true? Who would I be without this thought?”
It’s also useful to identify neutral moments. Were there moments today when you didn’t feel difficult emotions? When you were brushing your teeth? Drinking a glass of water? Reading? Sleeping?

**Learning to Love Again**

Loving-kindness and compassion practices offer essential ways to mend the heart after trauma. Trauma survivors are often plagued by a sense that they are unworthy or inherently flawed. They may have trouble doing the “normal” meditation practices or fear that they are not mindful, diligent, or concentrated enough, which can lead to self-hatred and shame. Trauma survivors have had their trust and sense of connection shattered, and often have a hard time feeling kindness toward themselves and others. Loving-kindness practice can slowly rebuild these connections.

Imagine a young animal or pet and try extending loving-kindness toward it.

- Feel your heart center and breathe from this. Gently offer loving phrases to yourself such as: “May I love myself just as I am,” or “May I be happy, may I be peaceful, may I be safe, may I be free of suffering.” Some people find it useful to bring to mind an image of themselves as a young child when saying these phrases.
- When difficult emotions arise, try holding each one as you would a crying child. (Schmidt & Miller, 2004)
- It’s important not to force loving-kindness to the point where it can feel like silencing the pain.

**Aligning Practice: Connecting with Spirit (Optional)**

*If the idea of a ‘higher power’ is a source of resistance, feel free to either re-orient yourself to the term in a way that resonates, or skip it altogether. Dropping into the inner world does not require that you ascribe to spiritual terms.*

Based on your innate desires and abilities, those qualities you were born into this world with, consider God’s, Spirit’s and/or the Universe’s plan for your life. Use your unique qualities, desires, and preferences as clues; these are the characteristics that align with your calling (anchoring you); your calling propels you forward toward your vision (the endpoint/purpose).

How would it feel if you knew a power higher than yourself imbedded your desires to align with your calling and gives you everything you need when you need it to fulfill your vision? How would it feel to believe you are supported in this way, that you could achieve anything you desired?

Circle back to your desires, connecting with what it feels like to be called, to get excited about something or someone. Immerse in this feeling of this calling, to be compelled by a longing for more (this differs from a felt need to numb or avoid suffering). What can you do today to align a component of your career, and or personal life with your desires?

**The Journey Ahead**

In Part VIII, we came to know how to recognize, accept, and begin to heal unresolved trauma. We have come to see suffering as a part of being human and that we are not alone. We continue to experience a new and more intimate relationship with the inner world and the rich spiritual resources we find there. In Part IX, while we continue to attune, strengthen, and clear, we will turn to focus on aligning with calling.
PART IX: Living Your Calling: Aligning fruits with roots

How we spend our days is how we spend our lives – Annie Dillard

As mentioned in the introduction, there are elements in this curriculum and particularly in this Part of the curriculum, that may be interpreted as spiritual. However, know I write this book with no particular religion or religious lens in mind. Rather, readers should feel able to relate to the material regardless of their religion or lack thereof. If you are finding a section overly spiritual for your liking, use a term that better suits your beliefs or to skip the section altogether.

In western culture, there has been this attitude where we are discouraged from introspection or meditation. We took what we got and worked to meet the ‘ideal’ set upon us by our families, communities and society. Now we know better. We know that understanding ourselves enables us to manage emotions, buffers us from stress, and enables us to thrive. Conversely, when we live according to a prescribed 'ideal’ we become incongruent, fueling shame, hostility and competitiveness. Some cultures suggest it is selfish to live according to our desires, which illuminate the path toward our ‘calling’; this was well illustrated by Carl Jung:

* Meditation and contemplation have a bad reputation in the West. They are regarded as a particularly reprehensible form of idleness or as pathological narcissism. No one has time for self-knowledge or believes that it could serve any sensible purpose. Also, one knows in advance that it is not worth the trouble to know oneself, for any fool can know what he is. We believe exclusively in doing and do not ask about the doer, who is judged only by achievements that have collective value. …Western man confronts himself as a stranger …self-knowledge is one of the most difficult and exacting of the arts. (Jung, 1970, p. 582-583)

When we lack this self-knowledge that Jung speaks of, we are apt to deny our hearts desires, resulting in incongruence. When we live incongruently, we are prone to attract events and people into our lives that project areas of incongruence (often felt as shame or a strong dislike of this quality in another). In this way, projections are a gift, a sign we have left the path, calling us back.

Living a calling is about tuning into the present, leaning into what magnetizes us. A sign that we are living a calling, as opposed to following a whim, is a deep desire to contribute beyond ourselves. When we align with our calling, we are drawn to people and events that support our journey. Every task takes on the glow of our calling, even the most mundane work tasks can feel rewarding. A calling that enables us to thrive awakens all of our senses, pulling us into every moment feeling alive. The pleasure derived from every step comes from knowing our aim is noble, that we are working toward a great cause, and that we were built for it.

When discussing this idea of ‘living our calling, ‘concerns about opportunity and classism may arise. Our financial picture, status, and related opportunities are indeed all factors that interplay with our sense of coherence in that in our material and cultural assets influence our confidence to manage external stimuli. Those with a higher sense of coherence are more likely to set high goals and to have the confidence in their internal and external resources to reach them (Binswanger, 1991). This being said, living a calling is much broader than one’s ability to attain in the external world. Aligning with calling is about the inner world, our degree of self-integrity, which enables us to express ourselves authentically and to feel a sense of wholeness inside as we interact with the outer world. For example, even though many caregiving tasks might seem repetitive and mundane, it is possible to find meaning in such tasks, connecting to the larger vision beneath them. By connecting to meaning, whatever the daily task we are charged with, we can find deep joy and contentment. A calling isn’t necessarily to solve a particular problem (e.g., it is not my calling to chart, to administer medication, re-direct an employee). Instead, it is bringing my attention and
intention to whatever is happening in the moment, including my authentic feelings and values. While some work activities will drain us, like constant social stimulation may drain those with a preference for introversion, we honor inner cues, seeking reprieve when needed and seeking roles that play to our strengths whenever possible. Those roles and activities will be different for everyone, but we are offering our best contribution at work when our work is primarily energizing. For some, those activities might be like, working closely with team members, problem-solving, organizing, thinking strategically, making others laugh, etc. It is about increasing ability to be mindful, making each moment a more meaningful moment. Bringing the calm of the inner world to the activities of the outer world.

There is a significant connection between our capacity to thrive inside and outside work. When we have deep roots at work, where we feel congruent and have a high sense of coherence (meaning, comprehension, and confidence), we are likely to carry that same trust of self into our other life roles. Therefore, when we have a high sense of self-efficacy to live our calling at work, we will have a greater confidence to live our calling in our personal life too (Dames, 2018).

Research shows that believing in a higher power greater than our self enhances the benefits of mindfulness and our mental and physical health outcomes (Wachholtz, Malone, & Pargament, 2017). Trusting in our abilities is a core component of thriving, enabling an ability to feel held despite the chaos around us. Cultivating a sense of trust in a power greater than the limits of our humanity can bolster this sense of being ‘held’ but is not a requirement of thriving.

When meaning and connection drive our decisions and actions, fulfilling a felt sense of life purpose, we are living our calling.

The capacity to live our calling within the workday relates to our feelings of wellbeing, meaning, and confidence/self-efficacy in our work role (Dames, 2018). Making time to immerse in practices that uncover and illuminate calling builds self-trust and self-efficacy, which empowers people to act in ways congruent with their ‘real’ self. When we hear the call of the moment, often coming to us via an emotion, we will either embrace it or resist it. We are all born tethered to this calling, or rather to a series of yearnings that connect to a much larger calling, which aligns with our unique essence (the ‘real’ self). Our orientation to this calling has a significant impact on our ability to thrive. If viewed as a leash, we will feel threatened when it calls us out from the status quo (prescribed ideals). If viewed as an anchor, a sense of security and unconditional support promotes the ability to embrace and align with the call, knowing that in a way, we will be held by it.

This component of the curriculum turns to a focus on developing trust in our roots, which represent the essence of who we are. Mindfulness or being with our roots is the focus, as opposed to focusing on the fruits of our labour. When mindful, we are prioritizing the means/process above the end product/achievement. We develop habits of being through mindfulness, which enables us to interrupt automaticity, challenge old ways of being, and re-orient ourselves. Mindfulness moves us from subconscious thinking to a conscious sensing, enabling an ability to connect to our ‘real’ self. As we deepen our connection and relationship with our ‘real’ self, establishing a sense of safety with the inner world, we develop a trust with a higher self/a higher power, and we then lean into those things that align with our authentic desires and intentions; this is congruence.

Living our Calling and Congruence

“He who has a ‘why’ to live can bear almost any ‘how’” (Friedrich Nietzsche).
Like how an acorn has all the intelligence it requires to become the oak tree, every human being has a unique essence, designed to fulfill a unique purpose. There are moments in life when we awaken to that purpose, like the lifting of a veil, we awaken from our slumber ever so briefly. If we take notice, taking in what those moments show us, we gain insights into our 'real' self and the calling we are destined to serve. Our calling is that one thing we can’t put down, that ignites our desire. Signs we are living our calling include a sense of timelessness, feelings of immersion, interconnectedness, and joy; much like what we experienced when we were children.

Every person has a unique set of skills and talents that support their life purpose and desires, that serve as a calling to light the path. We need not compete with one another, as no one can fulfill our unique purpose, nor will following another's path be fruitful. As we live our calling, we gain sense of coherence (meaning, comprehension, and confidence in life) and congruence (acting out of our 'real' self). As a result, we can provide unconditional positive regard for self, which spills over into our relationships. With the ripple effect, we can then provide a safe space for others to be authentic, enabling a willingness to act out of their 'real' self, aligning with their unique calling. We are all connected, as we live our calling, we promote the ability for others to live theirs.

Understanding our essence is challenging in the west where the pressure to ascribe to cultural ideals is the norm. The majority push out those who go against the cultural grain out, threatening their primal need to belong. However, there are many cultures we can learn from that celebrate diversity, encouraging each person to forge their path according to the unique blueprint they are born with as illustrated by Sobonfu Some, a teacher, author, and activist from West Africa:

I am from the Dagara tribe, and in my tradition it is customary for pregnant women to go through a hearing ritual. The purpose of a hearing ritual is to listen to the incoming baby; to find out who it is; why it's coming at this time; what its purpose is; what it likes or dislikes; and what the living can do to prepare space for this person. The child's name is then given based on that information.... In the Dagara tradition, you own your name up until the age of five. After the age of five, your name owns you. Your name is an energy; your name has a life force. It creates an umbrella under which you live. That is why it is important to hear the child before giving him or her the name, because the name must match their purpose. My name, Sobonfu, means "keeper of rituals." (Some, 2019)

**Living a Calling in the Research**

Thriving in a self-actualized state requires a willingness to live our calling (Duffy et al., 2013). While there may be many practical reasons to follow the paths recommended by those we respect, this will not sustain us. Meeting financial needs and acquiring achievements must be weighed against the longings of the heart. While there may be times in life when an unmet financial takes priority, we are wise to also consider the impact that our choices will have on our ability to be congruent. Congruence requires us to acknowledge and do our best to honor our heart's desires (passions), and to find meaning and purpose in our work. Silencing the inner voice, which may feel less important than the opinions of others or cultural priorities, puts us at a higher risk of moral injury and eventual emotional burnout.

**Supporting our Ability to Live our Calling with Self-Efficacy**

Feelings of confidence to navigate challenges, knowing we have the resources to do so, enables us to thrive (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2007). To name a goal and move toward it shows self-efficacy; self-efficacy is a part of sense of coherence.

*Self-efficacy is the confidence and belief in our self to achieve our goals.*
Goal setting theory and social cognitive theory both acknowledge that self-efficacy and conscious goal setting are imperative to our likelihood of attaining our goals (Bandura, 1997; Locke, 1996). When we reach our goals, it empowers us, and as a result, we reprogram our subconscious to continue creating goals, adjusting our actions to move toward achievement (Bandura, 1997).

Intertwining self-efficacy with sense of coherence, those who have higher sense of coherence scores are often more committed and therefore more likely to keep their physical and mental health goals (Anderson & Berg, 2001; Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010; Garrosa, Moreno-Jiménez, Rodríguez-Muñoz, & Rodríguez-Carvajal, 2011; Judge & Bono, 2001; Lo, 2002; Luthans & Jensen, 2005; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007). Similarly, those with greater self-efficacy are more committed, use better task strategies to meet goals, and respond more positively to negative feedback than do people with lower self-efficacy (Locke & Latham, 1990; Seijts & Latham, 2001). Zimmerman et al.’s research (1992) found that self-belief and self-efficacy promote an ability to set lofty goals, take ownership of them, and fuel our desire to regulate and meet them. Finally, those who have higher levels of self-efficacy also tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction, work performance, and goal achievement (Binswanger, 1991).

Self-efficacy and the resulting achievement of goals relates to Rogers’ (1959) theory of congruence. He suggested that successful goal setting requires congruence between our ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ self, to feel ownership, and desire to achieve them. Setting ‘ideal’ goals that are not subconsciously supported by the ‘real’ self will likely lack the desire and commitment required to reach them (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Therefore, goal setting supports the notion that those acting from a more congruent and self-actualized state of mind will be more likely to achieve their goals and gain more self-efficacy in the process.

Purpose and meaning in our work correlates with greater congruence and attachment to our profession and organization (Cardador, Dane, & Pratt, 2011; Dames, 2018). Meaning and purpose are characteristics of thriving. Munn (2013) described this engagement as:

Enjoyment of one’s job versus the duty of doing one’s job to obtain a paycheck is also likely to be influenced by the organizational culture in which the individual works and can show his or her true personality. For instance, do employees have the freedom to be themselves? Or must they hide their true identity because it doesn’t fit within the standards of their work environment. …The freedom to be oneself within the environment we spend at least a quarter of our day significantly impacts our reactions not only to work but also to how we handle the world. (Munn, 2013, p. 409)

**Living Our Calling with Meaningful Life Roles Outside Work**

Meaningful life roles outside work promote an ability to manage workplace stressors (Dames, 2018). Identifying with over one life role diversifies our sense of self, preventing us from putting all of our eggs in one basket. There is a positive correlation to our overall self-efficacy, established success in other life roles, and sense of overall life meaning. Meaning in work is the subjective perception that our labour is significant, that it promotes personal growth, and that it contributes to a greater cause (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). Work is one source where people can draw meaning from in their lives, but other influential sources can add or subtract from our overall assessment of our ability to lead a meaningful life (Allan, Duffy, & Douglass, 2015).

When life roles and work roles have a positive balance, there is a 21% increase in work feeling meaningful. Conversely, when life roles and work roles conflict, employees experience 6% less meaning in their work (Mann, 2013). Furthermore, there is a significant connection between our ability to experience meaning in our roles inside and outside work, where our degree of satisfaction with one directly impacts the other (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013).
Authenticity versus Assimilation

Living your calling enables you to find your magic. When you live your calling there is a certain groundedness and shininess that draws people in. Hearts open, doors open, and the future unfolds with a felt sense of sacredness and inspiration that feeds your desire and fuels your momentum.

So often, we compromise our authentic way of being to fit in with the larger group, which may be a learned habit from our childhood and/or it can occur in homogenizing cultures (threatened by diversity). When we compromise who we are for the sake of the group, we are entering a relationship that has perceived conditions. These perceived conditions promote incongruence (a felt need to prescribe to an 'ideal' as opposed to being 'real'); the greater the incongruence, the more shame we carry.

Getting 'real' in the workplace minimizes the pressure to assimilate to one prescribed way of being. Feeling like we can authentically express ourselves in the workplace mitigates external pressures to assimilate to a prescribed way of being, enabling congruence.

Shame, a self-conscious emotion, is one of the most powerful motivators and disablers in the human experience (Bond, 2009). “In shame, perfection is sought; one is either perfect or a total failure, one does not experience anything in between” (Bond, 2009, p. 134).

It is not uncommon for healthcare environments to be homogenizing in nature. Professional ideals have little flexibility for a diversity of personalities and alternative ways of being. The basic human requirement to belong, to be accepted, and to be loved creates a need to assimilate, despite the resulting dissonance.

Perfectionism fuels incongruence and feelings of shame and is born from the need to prescribe to a social ideal. While there are benefits to perfectionism, in its more extreme forms it causes unrealistically high standards for self and others, rigid thinking, and a high risk of using substances or activities to cope with the resulting stress. Highly perfectionistic professionals perpetuate co-worker hostility; the high standards we put on our self and the shaming that occurs when standards fall short often spill onto others.

Aligning Practice: A Meeting with your Future Self

You will find multiple versions of ‘Future Self’ meditations online, adapt the practice as you like, ensuring that the images and questions resonate with you. You can do this practice as often as you like. It is a helpful grounding and aligning practice, empowering decisions that align with one’s essence and calling (more on calling in part IX). I adapted the below practice from resources provided by High Performance Habits (Marshall, 2019).

Make yourself comfortable sitting cross-legged or sitting in a chair. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breath, observing it as it moves in and out of your body. Focus on the exhale, noticing how each breath deepens your state of relaxation. When your attention wanders, bring it back to your breath, and with each redirection let yourself sink deeper into relaxation. Let each external sound be a reminder of the gift of the inner world, how we can leave the noise and stress of the outside world as we continue to cultivate a deep sense of inner quietness.

PAUSE

As you straighten your spine, imagine it as a cord that grounds you to the earth’s center. Imagine this cord is your anchor, enabling you to stay connected to the earth, no matter where your inner journey takes you. Continue to let your breath deepen your sense of relaxation as you exhale any tensions that arise.
PAUSE

Bring to mind a peaceful lake. Imagine yourself bending down and picking up a pebble near your feet. Toss the pebble into the water and notice the ripples that extend outward one after the other until they dissipate and become once again calm. Imagine that your body is this body of water. Drop a breath, like a pebble, into your body of water. As you drop each breath into your body, you can feel the waves of relaxation ripple outward. Ripples of relaxation flow throughout your body, extending out from your spin to your chest and back, and down your legs as the ripples dissipate back to the earth. Let the ripples spread into every muscle of your back, across your neck and shoulders, up into your jaw and the muscles in your face. Feel your eyes and scalp relax with each breath. With each breath, you embrace the waves of relaxation that wash over you.

PAUSE

Bring your attention to the space in between your eyes. Imagine a beam of light that extends out of this space. Follow the beam as it leaves this building, this city, this country, and out into space. As the beam extends to outer space, you notice the curvature of the earth below. As you travel outward, you embrace the calm and quiet of space. You can see the earth beneath you, surrounded by an infinite and vibrant universe. Enjoy the sense of vastness you experience here.

PAUSE

Bring your attention to another beam of light near you. Follow this beam back down to curvature of the earth as it takes you 20 years into the future. Follow the beam and as you come closer to the end, notice where you are, this is where your future self lives 20 years from now. What does it look like? What surrounds you? Move closer to the dwelling or the nature that surrounds the home of your future self, noticing the details of the landscape. What do you see? Is there water, trees, flowers? How do you feel here? Immerse and get a sense of this place.

Approach the door to the home your future self. Know that on the other side of that door, your future self awaits, eager to greet you. The door opens, what do you see? Greet your future self and notice how your future self receives you, welcoming you into this time and place. Take in the image and get a sense of your future self. What do you notice? What is the expression on her/his face? What is he/she wearing? How is he/she standing? Get a sense of his/her essence. Focus again on the dwelling, notice the colors, the feel. What kind of person lives here?

PAUSE

Your future self offers you a refreshment and motions you to move to a comfortable place to sit. Settle in here, make yourself comfortable. As you both sit across from one another, you ask the following questions:

First you ask, “In the last 20 years, what do you most remember?” “What stands out most in your memory?” Take a moment, allowing enough space and quietness to hear the answer.
You then ask your future self, “What do I need to be most aware of to get me from where I am now to where you are?” “What would be most helpful for me to know?” “What qualities of my real self can I cultivate that will help me on this journey?” Take a moment, creating a space, as you lean in to hear the answers.

Now, ask your future self your own questions. What other questions do you have?

PAUSE

You are ready to leave now. You thank your future self for sharing this place and their wisdom with you.

You find your way back to the beam of light that brought you hear. As you follow the beam of light back to outer space, you watch the world grow smaller and smaller behind you. You again see the curvature of the earth and the bright blue, brown, and green ball amid the vast universe. You notice the beam of light that you initially followed and as you intersect with it, you turn to follow it back down to the earth, back to present time. As you travel down, you notice the earth growing larger and larger, you move through the clouds, back down to your country, to your city, to this building and to this room.

You are back in present time, alert and refreshed. You know that you will remember what you need to from this inner journey. Remain silent as you open your eyes. Take a moment to reflect on how you feel. Jot down any new insights.

Living our Calling by Developing Authentic Habits

Perfectionism and sense of coherence inversely link (Rennemark & Hagberg, 1997); those that have low sense of coherence scores have higher perfectionism scores. Therefore, a proposed strategy for addressing perfectionism is to focus on developing sense of coherence, which may lower the felt need for perfectionism. Perfectionism inversely links with congruence and self-compassion, both of which require a willingness to be authentic and unconditional positive regard for self when social pressures to assimilate are strong.

Creating and sustaining cultural change requires a structure to support its growth. Organizational leadership sustains the structure necessary for seeds to germinate and to sustain growth. The twelve-step model, originating from Bill Wilson’s Alcoholic Anonymous program, has had decades of success, showing how structures can support the personal growth and healing of millions. Both Bill Wilson and Carl Jung believed the 12-step model was a spiritual program applying far beyond alcoholism (McCabe, 2015). In many 12-step groups, people experience unconditional positive regard for the first time. By experiencing unconditional positive regard, it enables people to feel loved and accepted as their ‘real’ self; as a result, there is an opportunity for people to mirror this same love and acceptance inwardly. When we feel safe, our inner world opens, providing a sweet fragrance that soothes us and enables us to heal. Related twelve-step principles (AA, 2001) and slogans include:

- We are not alone or wholly self-sufficient
- Progress, not perfection: challenging perfectionism and making room for experiential learning supported by cultures that celebrate diversity and lifelong learning.
- Mentorship: mentors demonstrate unconditional positive regard for others, which requires the mentor to have self-compassion/unconditional positive regard for self, congruence, and empathy.
- Agreeing to disagree: celebrating diverse ways of being and thinking.
- Keep your side of the street clean (regularly make amends to those you harm).
- It is not about believing in a higher power, it is enough to be willing to believe.

**Living our Calling by Filtering ‘Spells’- Is it True? Is it Personal?**

Our words are powerful. Author XX Ruiz writes that our words are “spells” that create our realities when we believe that people tell us, and we believe what we tell ourselves, regardless of what is true. In order to minimize “spelling” and encourage reality, Ruiz wrote about four agreements. The four agreements (Ruiz, 1997), based on ancient Toltec teachings, provide tools to re-orient and filter external stimuli; both of which promote authenticity and self-integrity. Filter what you bring in and what you contribute to others by:

1. **Using your words wisely and filtering other’s words carefully.**
   - Words are powerful; we can use them as gifts to encourage or weapons to project our shame and pain onto others. Hostility in the workplace festers by projecting shame through gossip. Truth telling is an important part of maintaining our self-integrity, a requirement to feel safe to drop into the inner world. When we say things that are not congruent with our 'real' self, our shame grows, and we erode self-trust and self-confidence.
   - **Self-integrity, our ability to be authentic and feel whole, is priceless.** Doing or saying anything that erodes your sense of self, stripping you of inner peace, is too expensive.

2. **Recognizing that it’s not personal.**
   - When people's words and behaviors are hurtful, it comes from their own pain and shame; it is a subconscious projection that is often more about them than us.
   - When we assume it is personal, we are agreeing with what is being said, without critically examining whether it is true. Taking other peoples’ projections personally hands over our personal power and diminishes our self-integrity.
   - Taking in another’s shaming projection makes their pain your pain, causes unnecessary suffering, and perpetuates the victim perpetrator cycle.

3. **Avoiding assumptions.**
   - Assumptions limit choice. Rather than determining whether information is true, we take the opinions of others and even our own thoughts as truth; this creates a snowball effect on our emotional state and our ability to think critically and to make objective decisions.
   - When we assume and take other's projections personally, our shame grows, making us more prone to anxiety and depression.
   - Miscreations and misunderstandings are based on faulty assumptions and often lead to unnecessary conflict.

4. **Doing your best AND practice self-compassion when you fall short of your ‘ideal.’**
   - Based on your sense of coherence and congruence and the context you are in, you will use the resources available to you to act. Understand that your ‘best’ can change from moment to moment and day to day, depending on your felt congruence, on the emotions coming and going, and the supporting resources you have at your disposal (all of these relate to our sense of coherence).
   - The first three strategies only work if you are willing to do your best with the resources you have (internal and external).
   - Trying too hard to do your best and ascribing to an unrealistic ideal rather than trusting yourself, results in incongruence actions that prevent us from thriving and make us more prone to
perfectionism. Perfectionism can limit flexibility and the ability to adapt and create, preventing you from being your best.

- Your best requires mindfulness and authentic desire. Doing your best requires heartfulness (dropping in and connecting to the inner world), which requires congruence with our ‘real’ self. Taking on actions out of other people’s desires, rather than your own, causes incongruence and makes doing your best impossible. Furthermore, others recognize when your heart is not engaged.

**Clearing Practice: Filtering the ‘Weather’**

To deepen our knowledge, use the description of the four Agreements/filtering strategies above to fill out the blanks below.

1. Use your _______ wisely

Think of a time when a co-worker spoke honestly/authentically, even though it may have been difficult, that helped make a change in the workplace. How did the person’s words impact your behavior? How might you apply this strategy in the workplace?

2. Recognize its not ______________

How does this strategy impact you when you reflect on your reactions to other people’s words and behaviors? How can you apply this strategy at work the next time you feel threatened by someone’s words?

3. Avoid ______________

Think of a time when you or a co-worker made an assumption that turned out to be incorrect. How can you apply this strategy the next time you feel a strong emotion based on someone else’s words or behaviors?

4. Do your __________

What aspects of this strategy impact you? Can you connect to any self-judgment here and if so, are you able to practice self-compassion? How can you apply this strategy in your everyday life?

**Living our Calling and Navigating Homogenizing Cultures**

“*Hurt people hurt people*” (Wilson, 1994).

Healthcare work environments are often homogenizing, resulting in incongruent employees. Homogenization occurs when cultures pressure people to assimilate to a narrow way of being or a prescribed emotional display. Awareness of homogenization helps us step back (non-attachment), promoting the ability to recognize and navigate the social pressures, and to maintain our self-integrity (congruence) in the process. The ability to remain tethered to our ‘real’ self despite pressures to assimilate to a socially prescribed 'ideal,' is a requirement of congruence.

Homogenizing healthcare environments prevent workers from feeling emotionally safe, limiting their willingness to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is a requirement of authenticity (congruence). To attain
the emotional safety required to act authentically, we need relationships of unconditional positive regard inside or outside work. Those who do not have relationships of unconditional positive regard are more likely to repress dissonance due to the threat of horizontal violence if they express it, leading to incongruence and resentment.

When we believe we have people who provide us with unconditional positive regard, we are more likely to mirror the same acceptance inwardly (self-compassion), gaining congruence. As a result, we can then provide the same for others. If we are self-compassionate, we are more reliant and trusting of our roots, as opposed to depending on the approval of others. Therefore, we are far more resilient in homogenizing cultures. Congruence and self-compassion buffers us from feelings of threat, preventing stimuli from becoming stressors, and prevents maladaptive perfectionism. When we feel incongruent, we experience shame for our inability of our 'real' self to align with ‘ideal’ expectations.

In homogenizing work cultures, individuals who disturb the status quo often become targets themselves. The pressure to maintain the status quo, threatened by those who do not conform to the implicit cultural rules, is a homogenizing force that sustains old subconscious ways of being, even though they no longer serve us. Homogenizing behaviors rarely benefit anyone. Those who argue for acceptance of diversity become vulnerable to scrutiny and those who comply with assimilation often feel unsettled and ambiguous (incongruent). A chronic denial of our ‘real’ self to assimilate to an ‘ideal’ is a barrier to thriving (Rogers, 1959). Additionally, in homogenizing cultures, diversity produces implicit fears of conflict, which further pushes differences into shadows and makes them even more divisive. Shame festers in the shadows, inflaming maladaptive perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, and horizontal violence.

Turning the cultural tide requires formal and informal leadership. We must illuminate homogenizing cultural behaviours via compassionate awareness building. As a community, we can articulate common stressors, working toward organizational priorities that support authentic ways of being, celebrating diversity, and promoting inward and outward focused unconditional positive regard.

**Peace Is Not...** (Chinn, 2018)

Establishing a sense of peace within homogenizing cultures differs greatly from typical ways we learn to ‘keep the peace.’ It is important to recognize and move away from the old ways that create dis-ease and distrust. Peace is not:

- Letting things slide for the sake of friendship
- Doing whatever is required to keep on good terms
- Criticizing people behind their backs
- Being silent at a meeting only to rant and rave afterward
- Letting things drift if they do not affect you personally
- Playing it safe in order to avoid confrontation
- Manipulating someone to avoid open conflict
- Coercing someone to do what you want
- Hearing distortions of truth without refuting them
- Indulging another’s behavior when the behavior is destructive
- Withholding information to protect someone else. (Chinn, 2018)

In other words, denying ourselves in order to ‘keep the peace’ only promotes discord/hostility within organizations. Flourishing organizations promote authentic expression, encouraging people to align their unique passions and abilities to their work roles. Another factor that promotes trust and therefore confidence to step out to align with our ‘real’ self as opposed to an ‘ideal’ prescribed to us, is belief in a power greater than ourselves.
Living our Calling and Trusting in a Higher Power

Trusting in our inner resources improves self-efficacy and trusting in a higher power enables thriving in the midst of suffering and ambiguity.

The placebo effect has a positive impact on our physical and mental health because it relates to our beliefs and our beliefs have a powerful impact on health outcomes. Meditation enables us to capitalize on such placebo effects, working to re-orient our belief systems. Those who meditate with a spiritual focus (a component of transcendental meditation), develop a greater ability to shift the mind away from physical concerns to focus on our place in the universe and/or relationship to a power greater than our self, promoting an ability to re-orient our belief system; as a result, we experience more positive results than those that do not (Wachholtz, Malone, & Pargament, 2017).

In a study performed by Frecska, Bokor, & Winkelman (2016), people who prayed could avoid the depleting effects of emotional labour/emotional suppression and had a greater ability to avoid temptation. They suggested that prayer was a social interaction with God and social interactions promote cognitive function, improving our ability to change less favorable habits.

The research supports the biblical advice to pray for our enemies (Mat 5:44, New International Version). Prayer improves our concern for others, the ability to forgive, and promotes conflict resolution (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, Graham, & Beach, 2010). Confidence that we have the resources to manage our inner and outer world is a component of sense of coherence. Believing in a higher power satisfies the two other components of SOC, an ability to find meaning and to comprehend/understand life events. Trusting that a higher power has a plan beyond our control cultivates forgiveness, gratitude, comfort amid suffering, acceptance, and optimism and hope in the face of ambiguity.

**Strengthening Practice: Getting to what is Essential**
Remember those times in your life when you are fulfilled in a moment or by a task, when a talent or passion was so clear and invigorating. These moments provide clues about who we ‘really’ are, why we are here, and what makes us unique. Each time we notice those moments of knowing, and when we drop into ourselves, we gain trust and familiarity with our inner world; we gain insight into our essence. Journaling what types of activities energize us and what types of activities drain us can give us a lot of clarity.

Coming from a self-compassionate lens, where your value is not dependent on the opinions of others, nor your achievements, in what ways have you made a difference in your world/family/career/friends/community? Or if it is too difficult to name these characteristics in yourself, other techniques that can provide clarity include:

1. Consider what characteristics you most admire in others. What we most admire in others may mirror similar qualities within ourselves that have not yet fully emerged.
2. Ask others who knew you before that age of 7 (before we become clouded by social conditioning) what unique characteristics stood out to them, what seemed to bring you joy, what environments and activities did you thrive in?
3. Find pictures of yourself as a child, see if you can capture the sense of joy and freedom that existed prior to incongruence. Often, we can even identify when the joy of living got clouded (can you see a difference in the smiling eyes?)

When you have garnered enough clues, reflecting the essence of who you are, apart from social conditioning, write down past achievements you are most proud of (work or personal).
a. Do you notice any themes or patterns emerging from #1 and #2?

What are your core values? See if you can notice your tendency to name what you ‘should’ value. While there is nothing wrong with ‘ideals’, the point is to ensure they are congruent with your ‘real’ self, not prescribed onto you by others/culture. Those that are real, that are essential to you, are the values and priorities you cannot put down; they are a part of your essence.

b. Dig deeper into your true self, connecting to desire and to love. What core values are true to you?

Take a few moments to recognize where you have come from to where you are now, cultivating gratitude by looking back rather than looking forward. Take stock of all you are learning on the journey. Spend a few moments thinking about what you are most proud of in your life. Use these as clues to what is most essential about who you are, what you value, and the unique path you are destined for.

Goals that are congruent with your desires and values are far more likely to be achieved. Aim high! If fears arise, remember, courage is all about feeling the fear and acting anyway, when it is the right decision for you and others. Connect to your desire, don’t settle for what seems easy; connect to what excites you, to what you will fight for.

c. Make 1-2 short term goals (within the next 1-3 years)

d. Make 1-2 long-term goals (beyond 3 years)

Aligning Practice: Roles that Fill and Roles that Empty Us

By reflecting on personal experiences, there is an opportunity to develop awareness and acceptance of unique belief systems, values, and resources and/or barriers that impact the ability to practice self-compassion and engage in thriving. Self-awareness is a component of mindfulness.

As for the roles we play, how would you fill this out?

Human First (or are your human needs put behind another role?), ____________Second, _________Third, ___________Fourth

This activity intertwines with the Congruence Quiz presented earlier. Much like we often ascribe to ‘ideal’ characteristics, we do the same with the roles we play. Awareness of these roles is a component of mindfulness, a requirement of non-attachment, and necessary to determine if they continue to serve us.

When describing who you are, what is your first response?

Do you jump right to what you do for work or do you describe what you love to do or perhaps you identify more with the familial and social roles you play (spouse, parent, etc.). How do you think others would describe you?

Most of us will identify with and promote the roles held in high social regard, and in industrialized cultures, these are the roles that show the greatest contribution to society. What roles are you playing? Are you able to decipher what roles you play based on a prescribed ideal versus a role that aligns with what is essential or ‘real’ about you? List the roles that align with your ‘real’ self (hint, those that align with our ‘real’ selves
are easy to get lost in, time flies, we tend to gain energy). Can you identify what part of the role is fulfilling you? What components feel fun/invigorating? Why are they providing meaning (compared to the roles that are not?) What core values do they align with?

Now, list the roles that satisfy a prescribed ‘ideal’? If you're struggling with deciphering the difference, consider if the roles you play align with what is essential (your desires, values, goals)? Our socially prescribed roles tend to take greater effort and often burn up our energy. Or perhaps you feel neutral about the role, but it burns up a great deal of time, making it difficult to play the role you are passionate about. The answer to these questions provides insight into our ability to live our calling and ultimately, to thrive.

*Spending too much time in one role, especially a role that does not fulfill you, can be detrimental if it prevents you from living your calling.*

What component of these roles feels ‘ideal’ but not ‘real’ to you (incongruent with your values/essence)? Work at deconstructing the role, getting to the core of what is causing dissonance for you.

If you had to pick one role or activity that takes up a great deal of your time and energy, or is out of line with your ‘real’ values/essence, what would that be?

Drop in. Imagine your life without the role/activity you noted above. Imagine every detail and worry was taken care of, and you were free of it, how would that feel?

What are the obstacles in the way of removing this incongruent area of your life? What do you fear will happen if you remove the activity or role from your life? When you consider this fear with your desire to live from your essence, which one are you and will you serve?

*Our courage comes from being so passionate about something that we are willing to act in the midst of our fears.*

What quality of self is required for you to remove that obstacle?

What actions are required to remove the obstacle(s)?

Will you take the action? If not, why? If so, when?

👍 This is a great time to cultivate self-compassion. Perhaps do some loving-kindness practices, acknowledging fear, comfort yourself like a child or a friend. From a place of non-attachment (stepping back), BE that person to yourself that offers unconditional positive regard.

**Aligning Practice: Exploring your Ikigai**

The Japanese concept of ikigai (ick-ee-guy) has drawn a lot of attention in the west, in part because of a popular study that suggests it may correlate with longevity (Sone et al., 2008). Ikigai can be roughly translated as ‘life purpose,’ or ‘the reason you get up in the morning.’ It is important to acknowledge that I am not Japanese and cannot speak about this concept from a cultural perspective; likely, much has been lost in translation.
For this curriculum, Garcia and Miralle’s (2017) popular development of this concept as connected to one’s desires, purpose, and individual talents in the process of making a living, may be useful. In Garcia and Miralle’s model ikigai reflects our essence, the desires and values that call us out of bed each morning. In the West, we are prone to work to save money so that one day we can retire, being free once and for all from the obligation. However, as with the many centenarians devoted to ikigai, there is reason to believe that re-orienting ourselves to work toward aligning all areas of our life with our passions and our sense of meaning and mission in the world is far more likely to improve our quality and quantity of life now and into our retirement years.

Finding your Ikigai involves connecting to activities you love. Recognizing and articulating the magic inside of you that the world needs right now. Identifying what you are good at and making a living with your skills, abilities, and passions. See if you can populate each of the circles. Start small, there is no need to dream up lofty goals, what is more important is keeping it simple and making it relevant to your life here and now. Which areas are less clear? Can you relate to the symptoms of being too focused in certain areas? We need a certain degree of congruence to recognize our unique values, skills, abilities and passions.
Congruence takes time in the inner world and practicing authentic expression. As you gain congruence, come back to the Ikigai, challenge your previous assumptions by dropping in and exploring if they still resonate.

**Aligning Practice: Anchored by Calling, Propelled by Vision**

Exploring and connecting to our essence empowers us to live our calling, fueled by a desire to contribute to a cause greater than ourselves. A similar but different term, is ‘vision.’ Our vision provides guidance and tangible milestones to motivate, remind, and celebrate the journey. Visions are descriptive and focused on the endpoint rather than the means to getting there. Our calling is our anchor, the lens through which we view the world, and is focused on the means to our end goals. Especially in the beginning, very few people will have a clear and succinct idea of their calling. Those of us who have ascribed to an ‘ideal’ above our ‘real’ selves will find it difficult to sort out what is a genuine call from within (signal) versus a prescribed call from external influences (noise). Forcing a calling might cause you to declare a calling that is out of sync with your ‘real’ self. Take your time, play with the idea, and hold your assumptions lightly. Calling work is deep and introspective and as we gain congruence it becomes easier to separate the signal from the noise. Start broad and let the finer details fall into place over time. Be open to surprise and be open to making changes.

The research shows that when we own our goals, which we formalize when we write them down, we are far more likely to achieve them. Your calling should be short enough to memorize and easily call upon. Embodying your calling anchors you to your values (essence) and acts as a north star, enabling you to align your actions and decisions. Memorizing your vision can be more difficult, as it is typically longer and more detailed. However, keeping it in a place you visit frequently will remind you to keep moving forward, especially in the face of challenges.

**Developing a Calling.** Use the above exercises (Getting to what is Essential and the Ikigai) as a treasure map, noting the patterns that emerge from what you are most proud of, what you are most grateful for, what values propel you forward, and what goals you aspire to achieve. Highlight key verbs that signify one or two core values that underscore your true self. Take your time, even letting it linger for a few days or a week. What value(s) are worth fighting for? What areas can you assimilate without compromising who you are (maintaining your congruence)?

Your essence will always emerge in a variety of ways in your life, reminding you who you are. Sometimes we must unwrap all the cultural conditioning that shrouds it, but we all have a unique essence. A short mission statement can have a powerful influence on your daily decisions. When congruent with your ‘real’ self, a calling/mission statement can empower your daily decisions and keep you motivated to reach your long-term goals.

**Articulating your North Star, Creating a Calling Statement**

1. Start with a verb (what you want to do),
2. Add an adjective (who you are aiming to engage),
3. Your desired outcome.

Combine the keywords into a short phrase as demonstrated in the framework below. Play with it; ensure it resonates for you.

**Sample Framework**

My calling is to: (what you want to do?) (who are you wanting to do it for?) (your desired outcome?)

For example, my calling is: (To help) (people) (feel safe being authentic).

“My calling is to help people feel safe being authentic.”
You aren’t stuck with the framework, feel free to use what resonates and leave the rest. For instance, these statements are structured differently:

“To enable people to feel connected to others.”
“To inspire others to be more than they thought they could be.”
“To cultivate the self-worth in women.”
“To help myself and others heal by practicing self-compassion and freely providing unconditional positive regard to others.”
“To promote congruence in myself and others by celebrating diversity.”

Developing a Vision. A vision enables these causes to take form, providing guidance and forward movement. Knowing the difficult work is an investment toward a worthy end, there is a motivation to keep going. When vision aligns with calling, the likelihood of staying motivated to reach our goals is far greater. Clear visions enable people or organizations to make moment-to-moment decisions according to how they align with their calling and/or desired future state. When anchored in shared values (calling), visions empower and motivate employees to maintain the momentum required to reach the desired future state.

The core principles of making effective vision statements are:

e. Paint a mental picture of your ideal life >5 years from now.

f. Reflect your values, your essence, and your calling.

g. Write in the present tense.

Drop into the inner world, taking a few moments to connect to your heart, letting the outer world fall into the background. While this exercise requires us to be in the thinking mode to complete, try to come back to the sensing mode as much as possible, reconnecting and ensuring that your written words are aligning with your essence.

Start by jotting down your calling.

My calling is________________________________________________________

Circle back to your core values. What is really important to you? What can’t you put down? These are directly related to your essence and are often reflected in your calling statement.

Now, put down some words that represent your ideal life. Try not to get too caught up in thinking by putting sentences together or trying to find the perfect word; just stick to single words, writing randomly, and following your instincts. Are your words beginning to paint a mental picture of your ideal life? If not, what is missing?

Now, you are ready to interweave your calling, your essence, and the components of your ideal life into a vision statement, which is the mental picture that propels you forward. Play with the words, finding ones that resonate and motivate you. Using a vision framework is a great way to get you started; one is provided below, but feel free to use whatever process works best for you! There are also examples provided but remember this needs to be 100% true for you, so be careful not to let the examples sway you from what is ‘real’ for you. Your vision statement will be especially powerful if it reflects your calling, essence, and your ideal life. Don’t get to stuck by trying to make it perfect. Your vision is a living statement that can be tweaked and adjusted as often as you like.

SAMPLE FRAMEWORK
In my daily life, I strive to be/honor/uphold *(your core value(s))* in all that I do. I am fulfilled by *(insert what you are passionate about, what motivates you)*. Each week, I work to progress toward *(what milestone/skill aligns with your calling)*. I am empowered and enriched when I connect to *(your super power here/your strengths)* by doing *(how you apply your strengths to your personal life and your work life)*. I am continuously working to refine/develop *(skill you are striving to improve)* and I will strive to stay connected to who I am/my essence/my calling by *(activity/practice that enables you to connect to your inner world)*.

Examples:

My Calling is to *help people feel safe to be authentic*.

My Vision Statement:
*In my day-to-day life, I strive to be authentic in all that I do. I am fulfilled by a hunt for beauty and value in unexpected places and people. Each week I strive to come to know, trust, and act from the essence of who I am. I am empowered and enriched by connecting to my calling to help others feel safe to be authentic. I am continuously working to develop my self-integrity and I strive to align with my calling by heartfully connecting to my inner world and the desires within it.*

Phillip’s Calling is to *enable himself and others to maximize their time doing what they love*.

Phillip’s Vision Statement:
*In my day-to-day life, I strive for the ability to feel free to live free. Connecting to my loved ones, nature, and music fulfills me. Each week, I strive to spend quality time with my loved ones and to explore what is meaningful to me. I am empowered and enriched when I help others spend more time doing what they love. I am continually working to refine my ability to unconditionally love others and I will stay connected to who I am through mindfulness and meditation.*

Visioning with Kids. Visioning can also be a valuable activity to do with children, helping them dig into what is fun (taps into their desires), what their super powers are (clues about their essence), and what motivates (clues about their calling) them. Keep it light and make it fun – again, nothing is in stone and it can be adjusted as often as you/they like. Kids often have a much clearer idea of their essence (what they love, desire, and value) than adults do.

Piper’s (6-year-old girl) vision (feel free to change the structure to make more kid friendly, the frame below required plenty of parental assistance).
*Each day, I try to be a good listener and to be honest in all that I do. I am excited by going to new places I have never been. Each week, I work hard to earn an allowance so that I can buy things that enable me to be creative and that are comforting to me. I am continually working to help people feel noticed and remembered and I stay connected to who I am by doing things I find fun.*

Beckett’s (5-year-old boy) vision (parental assistance with wording):
*Each day, I try to be honest and nice to other people in all that I do. Doing new things and going to new places excites me. Each week, I work hard to earn my allowance so that I can buy toys that go fast and that enable me to learn new tricks. I show love to others through hugs and taking time to play with them. I honor who I am by speaking up about what sounds fun and true to me.*
The Journey Ahead
In Part XI, we came to know how to live a calling by aligning our goals and actions with our desires and values. We developed a calling statement that will anchor us to our essence and guide our steps as we move toward our desired future state (vision).

In Part X, we turn to focus on how our roots intertwine with others, those we serve, those we lead, and those we work alongside. We learn the value and core components of shared vision and compassionate leadership strategies.
Part X: Looking Forward to Thriving Communities: Connecting root systems

**Authentic relationships and supportive communities help to remind us who we are when we forget (Demers, 2019).**

While most of this curriculum focuses on establishing the roots (Figure 1) of caregivers, managing the weather (external factors including organizational structure and priorities) is imperative to create and sustain culture change. Focusing on one and neglecting the other is like expecting a fish to swim upstream; it may happen for a time but, without organizational momentum, the effort will become too burdensome, motivation will wane, and employees will succumb to the current.

Those in formal leadership positions with positions of authority, set the tone and standards in the workplace. To empower caregivers to flourish as leaders, we, as teachers and managers must let go of the old hierarchical and homogenizing power structures. Turning from fear and shame-based models, toward communities of practice that empower every voice, honor transparency, and share leadership. While hierarchies have their place to improve efficiencies and to limit ambiguity by providing structure and order, they can still uphold healthy and empowered democracies. Organizational momentum begins with by connecting members through a shared leadership model, upheld by a far reaching and practically relevant vision. The torch bearers of such a vision are the congruent leaders, mentors, and educators who role model respectful communication and unconditional positive regard. From here self and other-compassionate leaders emerge, inspiring compassionate teams who are inspired to provide compassionate care.

*Figure 1. The depth and strength on our roots (developmental assets) determines our perception of the weather (external stimuli); either viewed as a stimulus to navigate or a stressful threat to our basic needs. The 'weather,' presenting in a variety of forms, triggers unresolved trauma/stress from the past, contributing to high cortisol levels that can disable thriving; when unmanaged, our ability to objectively manage stressors (sense of coherence) is compromised. When we do not feel we have the necessary assets to meet our basic needs, incongruence (including shame) results.*
Connection to Others: Intertwining Roots

Dropping into our roots, tapping into the richness of the inner world enables us to forge deeper roots, improving our ability to manage stimuli before they evolve into stressors, to self-soothe amid times of stress, and to engage in thriving by aligning with our calling. However, our roots share the soil with others, intertwining and synchronizing, serving and being served. This intertwining is imperative, especially in times of scarcity, as we pool strengths and resources to continue moving toward our desired future state; this is community and while we may get somewhere faster alone, we get much farther together.

Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton (2010) reviewed 148 studies, covering over 300,000 participants, and found that there was a 50% increased likelihood of survival among those with strong social relationships. In other words, in a sample of people, if half of them died, in the group still living, there would more people alive with strong social relationships compared to those with weaker social ties. Supportive social relationships also improve our sense of coherence, which as described in Part I, is predictive for a host of positive physical and mental health outcomes. In terms of the health of organizations, those who feel more connected at work will have greater empathy for and trust of others, and are more likely to be cooperative (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Those who feel connected, believing they are unconditionally and positively regarded by others, are more likely to contribute to a positive workplace than those who do not.

Social connection is not about how many friends we have, it is our sense of authentic and unconditional connection to at least one person. Those who prefer introversion may have only one person they feel connected to, compared to another who prefers many social connections. The benefits relate to our perception of connection; this perception is a component of our sense of coherence (orientation to life), promoting contentment (stable root systems) and confidence to manage stimuli before they evolve into stressors. As illustrated in Figure 1, deep and stable root systems are less likely to feel threatened by the weather. Therefore, a person with one friend with whom they feel unconditionally and positively regarded from will reap more benefits than the person who has many conditional friendships. In the same way, workplace relationships characterized by unconditional positive regard promote connectedness and a sense of belonging. Jessica, a new graduate nurse, echoes this sentiment, demonstrating how feeling supported and safe at work re-oriented her perspective and capacity to cope with workplace stress (Dames, 2018):

*I was calling in sick often…because I dreaded going into work. I got put on probation because of it. It was a really unsupportive environment. I was super stressed out and burned out. There was no support there. There was no teamwork. There were no resources or senior nurses to ask questions. Now that I’m on floor [#], I feel safe, and it is so much better. No matter what happens, I can call for help, and someone will be there to help me. I don’t call in sick now. I feel supported and excited to go to work now* (Jessica).

Relationships that promote connection while also encouraging authentic expression are two of the core components required for us to internalize unconditional positive regard from others and to mirror the same inwardly. Besides the congruence that comes from authentic expression, we also gain confidence in our inner resources, promoting a greater ability to manage stimuli before they become stressors (sense of coherence).

Co-dependence versus Interdependence

Relationships characterized by conditional acceptance, where social norms or loved ones require assimilation for approval, are a characteristic of co-dependence. Similar to homogenizing cultures, described in Part II, we sustain co-dependence via subconscious projections fueled by shame. They often result from observed and learned habits that we picked up as children. Many of us have experience with co-
dependence, beginning in childhood and then perpetuated via incongruence, habit, and familiarity in adulthood. Breaking co-dependent habits can be difficult, especially when we are unaware of them.

As we journey toward congruence, we become uncomfortably aware of co-dependence, as it is a road block to authentic expression. This newfound discomfort is normal, and it is a good sign! What are signs of co-dependence?

- It is often characterized by black and white thinking, feeling judged or judging other’s actions as right or wrong based on rigid expectations (intertwining with perfectionism).
- Avoidance of conflict, threatening acceptance by others.
- Avoiding expression of our true opinions and desires, due to a fear of rejection.
- Caving to a prescribed way of being, choosing incongruence to avoid rocking the boat.

When co-dependence is rampant in work cultures, characterized by pressure (shaming) to assimilate to a narrow way of being, incongruence results, disabling thriving and perpetuating hostility.

Interdependence, on the other hand, is a balance of recognizing our dependence on others and honoring our independence as a unique individual. There is an innate tension between dependence and independence that ebbs and flows as a normal part of any healthy relationship. Conflict is bound to arise within this tension. In fact, conflict is a healthy part of relationships, as it is often the mechanism in which we establish and exercise our respect for our unique way of being while also honoring the same for another. Through conflict we work through the dependent-independent tensions, redefining where we end, and another begins. We learn to accept what we can’t change, and we learn to agree to disagree. In interdependent relationships, conflict is not so threatening because it does not uncover conditions that need to be met to be positively regarded. If conditions arise, there is a safe space to discuss those, even test them and reaffirm the safe nature of the relationship. To reap the benefits of relationships of unconditional positive regard, we must believe we have them; to believe it, we must test them. Testing them is a matter of expressing ourselves authentically and ensuring that all parts of our ‘real’ self are part of the accepted package and that that package as a whole, is unconditionally and positively regarded. Not that we won’t irritate others, or that people won’t dislike certain parts of us, but those parts of us are accepted as part of a much larger and positively regarded package. As a result, when interdependent, we can honor the differences in others without feeling threatened by them.

For communities of practice to flourish they require interdependent relationships, supported by a shared vision underscoring priorities that promote authenticity via relationships of unconditional positive regard. Authentic connection normalized conflicts and challenges, preventing caregivers from feeling isolated and threatened when opinions and ways of being differ.

We find common ground in our humanity, recognizing that we struggle with incongruence, working through the tension of feeling the need to be accepted and yet also striving to be ‘real.’ In these common human experiences, we can take comfort that we are not alone. For example, in a recent study two novice nurses, Candice and Jessica, felt empowered amid a turbulent time at the beginning of their caregiving journey because they knew that they were not alone and that what they were going through was a normal (Dames, 2018), “Just being aware of it and seeing it in writing and doing the self-exploration has really helped me cope with it…it has really helped me grow” (Candice). “It is nice to know that I’m not the only one that who is dealing with this stuff” (Jessica).

Organizational Visioning
Living a calling is fueled by a desire to contribute to a cause greater than us. A calling anchors us, grounding our roots, and provides the lens through which we view the world. Visions are more descriptive and focused on the endpoint rather than the means to getting there. When organizations agree on a common vision, goals and actions take form, providing the guidance, inspiration, and momentum toward common
goals. Effective visions provide a collective knowing that the difficult work is an investment toward a worthy end, providing the motivation to keep going.

When anchored in clear and shared visions, people and/or organizations are empowered and motivated make moment-to-moment decisions according to how they align with their calling and/or desired future state. Organizational visioning has three stages (NHS, 2018):

1. Formal leaders set the parameters for the vision
2. A small group creates the main features of the vision, representing those with a stake in the future.
3. The vision is shared broadly and explained locally.

John Kotter's six key characteristics of visions further inform the development process. They are:

1. Imaginable, conveying a clear picture of the future
2. Desirable; it appeals to the long-term interest of those involved
3. Feasible; they are realistic and attainable
4. Focused; they are clear enough to guide decision-making
5. Flexible; they allow individual initiative and alternative responses if and when conditions change.
6. Communicable; they are easy to communicate and can be explained quickly. (NHS, 2018)

**Visioning Compassionate Workplaces**

*Compassion is the antidote to the pervasive shaming that continues to fuel social dominance and erode workplace morale.*

Social movements need a structure to support growth; organizational leaders sustain that structure. Given the state of healthcare culture, pivoting to a more compassionate vision will require consistent maintenance, upheld by a shared leadership vision. Sustained change requires self-compassionate leaders to embody and extend compassion to others, underscoring the vision on a day-to-day basis. Michael West (2018), a key stakeholder in the NHS Improvement Process, stated that compassionate leadership involves:

- **Attending**: paying attention to staff – ‘listening with fascination’
- **Understanding**: finding a shared understanding of the situation they face
- **Empathising**
- **Helping**: taking intelligent action to help

"Research shows that the most powerful factor influencing culture is leadership" (NHS, 2017).

Sustaining compassionate work environments requires congruent and compassionate leaders that are empowered by a supportive organization structure and shared vision. Compassionate leaders’ model and promote relationships of unconditional positive regard, resulting in workplaces that celebrate authenticity and diversity. As discussed earlier, those high in self-compassion are more likely to project the same outwardly. Northern Health Services (NHS) in England is leading a wide spread compassionate leadership effort, supported by a program of research that shows significant improvements in caregiving culture and patient care outcomes. According to their research, when organizations embody compassion, supported and delivered by organizational leaders, they:

- deliver high quality care and value for money while supporting a healthy and engaged workforce.
- enable staff to show compassion, to speak up, to continuously improve and create an environment where there is no bullying, where there is learning, quality and the need for system leadership.
- Contribute to cultural safety, improving diversity efforts and outcomes. (NHS, 2017, p.3)
Leadership: Role-Modeling a New Way

Caregiving in today’s high stimulus and rapidly evolving healthcare environments requires leaders that are willing to role-model a new way forward. Every healthcare provider is a leader, capable of blooming where planted, gifting others with the fruits they bear, and empowering others to do the same.

We step into an informal leadership role the moment we cross the threshold into professional practice. Our capacity as leaders, as agents of change, has a significant impact on our work culture. Despite the implicit expectations on caregivers to act as change agents, many nurses report feeling unprepared for this role, underscoring the need for organizations to provide more support for leadership development (Sherman, Schwarzkopf, & Kiger, 2011). The foundational components required to encourage employees to step out of their comfort zone, forging their path as leaders, is to cultivate trustworthiness, respectful communication, and to normalize conflict within a culture of unconditional positive regard.

Research shows that trustworthiness is associated with elevated levels of oxytocin, a neurochemical that improvises empathy, prosocial behavior, organizational commitment, and teamwork (Zak, 2018). Therefore, high-trust organizations tend to have higher employee satisfaction rates, better morale, and better teamwork than low-trust organizations. The trustworthiness of leaders provides the relational blueprint from which their teams will tend to act from. Those who act in trustworthy ways, prioritizing transparency, openness, whole heartedness, and relating from an empathetic place set the tone in the workplace and as neuroscience demonstrates, these qualities provide a significant contribution to the health of employees and the organization (Zak, 2018).

Role modeling direct and respectful communication provides an environment where employees feel safe to authentically and assertively express themselves. Unfortunately, triangulated communication is the norm in many caregiving environments, eroding relational trust and safety.

**Triangulation occurs when we avoid addressing conflict with the person with whom we feel threatened by. Instead, we report our disapproval of another to peers or to a manager, leaving the person with whom we are disagreeing with (or disapprove of) out of the conversation while we build alliances behind their back.**

While building alliances with peers and management may feel safer, enabling us to avoid direct confrontation and thereby minimizing the risk of rejection, in the end it, fuels hostility and can do irreparable relational harm. This scenario repeating over and over amid a team of caregivers makes for highly volatile and hostile relations. Furthermore, triangulated communication often inflames miscommunication and conflict, involving more people and adding offences to the initial injury. This conflict management strategy is a form of horizontal violence that runs rampant in healthcare cultures.

**Normalizing Conflict.** Conflict is inherent in caregiving environments due to the high stimulus and fast paced nature of the work. Because tasks are driven by patient needs, which are continually changing, complex, and often unpredictable, decision-making is frequent and often urgent (Sherman & Pross, 2010). On one hand, differing opinions makes for a buffet of options, cultivating creative and flexible teams. On the other hand, if we view conflict as a threat, differing opinions cultivates tension and hostility.

Our ability to resolve conflict hinges on our understanding of how it typically unfolds. As elaborated on in Part IV, it is also helpful to recognize the defensive tendencies (the flight-flight-freeze response) of ourselves and our colleagues. When we can recognize defensive patterns, we are more likely to interrupt and diffuse the process. For instance, observing the reactions that occur when a colleague who avoids or flees from conflict has an emotional run in with another colleague who takes on a fighting posture when triggered, or the reaction that occurs when two colleagues who tend toward fighting amid a conflict.
Conflict has four phases, it begins with frustration, then moves to conceptualization, to action, and ends at outcomes (Thomas, 1992). Knowing about the phases of conflict can help us understand whatever phase we are in, enabling us to accept it and work with people where they are at, rather than where we think they should be. In terms of resolving conflict, there are 5 distinct approaches, which represent our assertiveness and cooperativeness in any given scenario. Depending on our preferences and habits, we often employ a mix of approaches (Barsky, 2016; Thomas, 1992). The five approaches are collaborating (assertive, creative, and cooperative), competing (aggressive, not cooperative), compromising (negotiating assertively and cooperatively), accommodating (passive but cooperative), and avoiding (passive, not cooperative). Use the attuning and strengthening practices below to some to know your conflict style tendencies and to assess conflict resolution effectiveness.

**Attuning Practice: Conflict Self-Assessment**

**Directions:** Read each of the following statements. Assess yourself in terms of how often you tend to act similarly during conflict at work, at clinical placements and at school. Place the number of the most appropriate response in the blank in front of each statement. Put 1 if the behavior is never typical of how you act during a conflict, 2 if it is seldom typical, 3 if it is occasionally typical, 4 if it is frequently typical, or 5 if it is very typical of how you act during conflict.

1. Create new possibilities to address all important concerns. 
2. Persuade others to see it and/or do it my way.
3. Work out some sort of give-and-take agreement.
4. Let other people have their way.
5. Wait and let the conflict take care of itself.
6. Find ways that everyone can win.
7. Use whatever power I have to get what I want.
8. Find an agreeable compromise among people involved.
9. Give in so others get what they think is important.
10. Withdraw from the situation.
11. Cooperate assertively until everyone’s needs are met.
12. Compete until I either win or lose.
13. Engage in “give a little and get a little” bargaining.
14. Let others’ needs be met more than my own needs.
15. Avoid taking any action for as long as I can.
16. Partner with others to find the most inclusive solution.
17. Put my foot down assertively for a quick solution.
18. Negotiate for what all parties value and can live without.
19. Agree to what others want to create harmony.
20. Keep as far away from others involved as possible.
21. Stick with it to get everyone’s highest priorities.
22. Argue and debate over the best way.
23. Create some middle position everyone agrees to.
24. Put my priorities below those of other people.
25. Hope the issue does not come up.
26. Collaborate with others to achieve our goals together.
27. Compete with others for scarce resources.
29. Cool things down by letting others do it their way.
30. Change the subject to avoid the fighting.

**CONFLICT SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORING TOOL**

Look at the numbers you placed in the blanks on the conflict assessment. Write the number you placed in each blank on the appropriate line below. Add up your total for each column and enter that total on the appropriate line. The greater your total is for each approach, the more often you tend to use that approach when conflict occurs at work. The lower the score is, the less often you tend to use that approach when conflict occurs at work.

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*Hurst (1993)*; ADD ELSEVIER Leadership Text REFERENCE...Part 4 Interpersonal and Personal Skills; Chapter 24 Understanding and Resolving Conflict

**Strengthening Practice: A Framework to Assess Conflict Resolution**

1. Quality of decisions
   a. How creative are resulting plans?
   b. How practical and realistic are they?
   c. How well were intended goals achieved?
   d. What surprising results were achieved?
2. Quality of relationships
   a. How much understanding has been created?
   b. How willing are people to work together?
   c. How much mutual respect, empathy, concern, and cooperation has been generated?


*ADD ELSEVIER Leadership Text REFERENCE...Part 4 Interpersonal and Personal Skills; Chapter 24 Understanding and Resolving Conflict*

In a culture of **unconditional positive regard**, collaboration and compromise are the preferred conflict resolution methods as they both promote assertive and authentic expression. As long as we share a common vision, empowered and underscored by unconditional regard of all team members, differing opinions are an opportunity for creativity and growth rather than a cultural threat. When we lead from this place of unconditional positive regard, we minimize the fear that often triggers a felt need to compete or to avoid of conflict. As a result, people are more likely to address conflict before it festers into personal offences.

Changing caregiving culture will require a systemic effort, addressing old ways of being, and providing new tools and techniques that support a shared vision, creating the momentum necessary for
lasting change. To illustrate the value of investing in education to re-establish a shared vision, Cervalo et al. underwent a program of research involving a health system in the United States that was known for lateral violence among its caregivers. They spent three years providing workshops aiming to strengthen communication in the workplace, delivering their curriculum to over 4,000 nurses and over 1,000 nursing students. They then studied the impact and found a 14 percent decrease in reports of lateral violence, a significant decrease in vacancy and turnover rates.

Forging new cultural habits where we as caregivers are addressing conflict in a respectful and productive fashion, requires a shared vision and shared tools to reach that vision. For example, a shared vision that compassionate relationships embed the organization promotes tools such as active and compassionate listening and seeking to understand differing perspectives. As these tools actualize in the workplace, employees stay motivated to continue investing in the effort. As for leaders, modeling these behaviors as individuals has a significant impact on workplace culture; this is the crux of leadership.

Effective Mentors: It’s not about Perfection
Effective mentors, those that inspire and support with unconditional positive regard, focus on progress, not perfection. Mentors that are congruent, that embody relationships of unconditional positive regard and empathy provide the safe emotional spaces necessary to encourage vulnerability and authenticity in the workplace. These mentor qualities align with Rogers’ (1951) work, where he suggested that relationships of unconditional positive regard improve congruence between the ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ self. This congruence then prevents feelings of shame, which is a common feeling associated with failing to meet unrealistic expectations. Candice, Mary, and Sarah, three new graduate nurses reflected these sentiments in the following statements:

“Having an authority figure [as a mentor] who really sees who I am, accepts me, and encourages me, [really] encouraged my growth.”
“If it weren’t for [my work mentor], I wouldn’t be where I am today.”
“I found that just having a mentor or someone you can go to, even just to vent about staff members…even just to ask questions that you might not be comfortable asking.” (Dames, 2018)

Mentors that offer unconditional positive regard demonstrated by their enduring support, despite novice caregiver’s vulnerabilities, provide an emotionally safe space to ask questions and to resolve areas of dissonance that may otherwise go unaddressed.

Besides encouraging authenticity, a mentor with social capital (a high degree of respect in the workplace) also promotes a willingness to take on vulnerable advocate roles that challenge the cultural status quo (Dames, 2018). Mentors that support authenticity promote self-efficacy and goal-achievement (Zimmerman et al., 1992). Retention rates positively correlate with the assignment of a formal mentor for new caregivers with benefits compounding the longer mentors are available (Salt, Cumming, & Profetto-McGrath, 2008; Scott et al., 2008). Furthermore, support systems that provide a nurturing space to be vulnerable enhance feelings of security and belonging (Brown, 2010; Rogers, 1959). Another factor that enables thriving is familiarity, acceptance, and feelings of belonging from within a work team, which requires work team and environment consistency.

Educators as Cultural Seed Tenders
“Teaching...emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a
chance to gain self-knowledge - and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject” (Palmer, 2007).

By empowering individual voices and affirming collective values, educators empower providers to bloom where planted. Educators include undergraduate faculty, workplace supervisors, and the experienced providers that mentor the novices in the field of practice. Educators have an enormous influence on the conditions and conditioning that informs the growth of newer members of their team. Educators are the seed tenders within healthcare culture; they use their power either to sustain or to challenge the status quo.

To change culture, interrupting the current perpetuation of incongruence and shame, we must address the perfectionism at its roots. Perfectionism is often compounded in post-secondary settings, especially among those who lacked unconditional positive regard in their upbringing (causing greater incongruence). Research suggests the stressors leading to burnout may begin in the undergraduate experience. Those experiencing feelings of burnout before entering the profession are at higher risk of leaving their position after only 10 to 15 months (Rudman & Gustavsson, 2012). The socialization of caregivers informs their ability to be congruent, aligning their ‘real’ values with professional ‘ideals.’ When the practice of being who one should be rather than whom one really is becomes a well-established way of life “they can no longer rely on their emotions to provide them with an accurate sense of their real attitudes, values, and feelings about other people or events. They have learned how to con themselves, and no longer know who they really are” (Bergquist, 1993, pp. 72-73). Feeling ambiguous about our self, how we feel, and the values that drive us, prevents the ability to resolve emotional dissonance. Conversely, in cultures that promote and celebrate diverse ways of being, thinking, and doing, it is likely we as caregivers will exercise our personality traits and personal values in our professional role.

O’Callaghan (2013) described a hidden curriculum in healthcare culture that promotes emotional incongruence. When students incubate in an environment of intimidation and shame in their training, emotional incongruence occurs. They are then likely to use the same incongruent behaviors within the workplace and towards their patients. The implicit curriculum shapes student identity and informs what kind of person they will be as a professional caregiver (Foster, 2007). Implicit components, making up the hidden curriculum, include program culture, customs, rituals, and how people relate to one another. “The highest form of love is the love that allows for intimacy without the annihilation of difference” (Palmer, 2007).

Palmer (1998), a seminal author in the field of education, described a need to develop the heart of educators, promoting a more holistic congruence of the heart, mind, and emotions of teachers and learners. This focus on habits of heart provides a pathway toward a healthy democracy, a way forward to a more sustainable and nourishing nursing culture. A shared vision among healthcare educators requires collective values to nourish and tend to the newest members, promoting deep roots (congruence and sense of coherence) so they can thrive in today’s high stimulus work environments.

We must understand that we are all in this together;
We must develop an appreciation of the value of otherness;
We must cultivate the ability to hold tension in life-giving ways;
We must generate a sense of personal voice and agency;
We must strengthen our capacity to create community. (Palmer, 1998, p. 44-45)

Habits of the heart keep us aligned with our calling, propelling us toward our vision and toward self-actualization. Authentic leaders and educators, held together by relationships of unconditional positive regard, fuel collective habits of heart, propelling organizations toward their vision.
The visioning process enables members to articulate shared values such as diversity and authenticity. These shared values act as the glue that holds healthy democracies together and buffers cultures from homogenizing tendencies. Sustaining healthy democracies requires members to live with the tensions that emerge in organizations that encourage diversity, which implies the ability for members to manage their emotions and to have an awareness and acceptance of the emotions of others (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). This reciprocal respect of our own and others’ emotions as they are (minimizing the surface acting described in Part II) takes a degree of individual and collective cultural congruence. These cultural habits provide the rich soil for individuals to bloom where planted.

Because educators are in a position of authority, their actions and behaviors have powerful ripple effects. Therefore, they have an opportunity to model and perpetuate empathy and congruence, promoting environments where relationships of unconditional positive regard can flourish. Role modeling enables a mirroring effect, inspiring others to walk a similar path and demonstrating that they too have the tools to do so. Role-modeling emotional congruence promotes reciprocal behaviors, which promotes authentic displays of emotion and perpetuates nurturing and respectful behaviors to co-workers and patients. For example, when we teach students about what it means to care for self, we must go beyond talk, it must be implicitly built into our way of being as caregivers. Mary, a novice caregiver in a recent qualitative study (Dames, 2018), found that the sheer amount of work in the program did not jive with self-care. It didn’t feel like you could succeed in the program and make time for self-care.” Sarah, found that she learned self-care through role-modeling:

“My [clinical mentor] would say, ‘are they really sick? Can it wait? Yes, it can wait, go on your break!’ I always thought more practice would be better in that way because you get to apply what you’re learning, including self-care. The application is what really nails it in.”

Role modeling is the most powerful form of teaching with the potential to promote learned behaviors that promote congruent or incongruent caregivers and caregiving work cultures. However, if educators do not feel congruent or are not working toward congruence themselves, then they cannot mentor students and novice providers to do the same.

**Aligning Practice: Workplace Alignment**

Can you recall any components of your organizations vision? What implicit (‘real’) values are reflected in your workplace culture?

Are these values congruent with your calling and the values that sustain it?

What areas do you feel enable authentic ways of being where you feel you can be vulnerable, creative, and play at work?

What components of your work life cause you to feel emotionally unsafe/unable to be your authentic self? If you can pinpoint specific times when feelings of threat arise, take note, what programmed thoughts do these uncomfortable feelings represent?

Often, the feelings of threat we feel are less about the moment and more about a previous unresolved event or thought program from the past (emotional transference). These unresolved/undigested forms of trauma will often continue to spring up, haunting us until we resolve it. Awareness of emotional
transference provides powerful insights and healing opportunities. When viewed in this light, what events at work often trigger strong emotions in you? What are these emotions uncovering from past experiences?

Drop into your inner space and work with the loving-kindness exercises, welcoming these emotions, enabling them to come, to be expressed, to be heard, and to be let go. Working with past ‘complexes’ or the ‘inner child’ is often most successful from a place of non-attachment, meaning coming from a third person perspective. Talk to the pain, the inner child, the complex, but don’t identify with it. YOU are a spiritual being; the body, the emotions, the experiences, they are all separate from your spiritual self; knowing this, enables non-attachment.

**Strengthening Practice: Circling back to Move Forward**

Living a calling describes how we stay connected to the present moment, aligned with the authentic self, while creating and moving toward end goals. While the means or process is important, having an endpoint is necessary to keep forward momentum; this is where visioning comes in. Before you begin, remember…practice is for progress not perfection. Reflect on how far you have come, how practice enables habits, and habits enable intuitive routines, and intuitive routines evolve from effort to ease. At first, re-orienting takes great effort, effort to stay focused, effort to connect to our inner voice, effort to lean in to the gentle whispers that bubble up from inside. We must feel safe enough to be willing to be vulnerable, to live with the questions the process creates, and to trust and surrender to our higher self. We access our higher self by dropping in to our inner world and by leaning into the subtle guidance we find there. With practice, responding to our higher self becomes more familiar, drawing us in, teaching us to trust, and letting go of the ‘figuring it out’ mind. Self-soothing grounds us in the inner world, buffering us from the tendency to rely on external substances and activities to deal with stress.

**Circling Back.** Reflect on your progress on this journey, beginning with learning about sense of coherence and congruence and identifying the unmet needs that simmer beneath the stress you experience. Reflect on the goal(s) you set for yourself. Using a self-compassionate lens, consider your progress. *Progress can take many forms such as an increased mindfulness, non-attachment, a greater awareness, and new ways of relating to yourself.*

Reflect back to the congruence exercise in Part II, observing the thoughts and emotions that arise from self/other prescribed ‘ideals’ that fail to align with your actual/ ‘real’ self. Speak kindly to the emotions, letting them come and just as easily letting them go. Drop into your heart and bring up those moments on this journey when you connected to desire, rather than obligation, remembering where you felt the most alive. What was it about those moments that struck you?

What practices did you feel a shift with? Which ones will you carry close as you journey on?

These moments reflect engagement in thriving; notice what you notice about them. Like a treasure map, these are important clues to what makes you unique, what enables you to tap into the abundant treasure box of the inner self, this is you engaging in thriving. Digging deeper, what common thread (essence) runs through the moments of shifting and thriving?

How does this common threat relate to your calling?

Hold your observation lightly, if they fade, gently let them go, trusting that everything you need to remember will be provided for you in just the right way at just the right time. Considering the components
of this curriculum that most resonated (noticing what you noticed), providing clues about your unique essence and life purpose, what are you going to take with you as you continue on this journey?

Now that you know what you know (from connecting to your essence), are your initial goals/intentions still aligning with your calling?

**The Final Recap and the Invitation that Awaits**

If you get stuck, or catch yourself acting out of obligation, making goals that ‘sound’ good, but don’t excite you, **Stop.** Listen for the invitation, which is always calling to us, waiting for us to respond. To respond we must drop in, connect to our ‘real’ self, the desires of our heart, as opposed to the ‘should’ statements we often march to. Use the grounding and centering tools provided in the curriculum to quiet you and clear out the debris that cloud your essence.

*Anchor to your inner world (drop in); lift your eyes to your north start (calling); create a vision that propels you forward; this is thriving.*

An invitation awaits, calling us to step into the life we were born to live. No matter how many times we turn down the invitation, it awaits us. Lean in to your inner world; when you do, you will find all of the courage you need to accept the invitation over and over again. To this end, may you forge deeper roots.

**The Invitation by Oriah "Mountain Dreamer" House**

*It doesn’t interest me what you do for a living.*
*I want to know what you ache for*
*and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart’s longing.*

*It doesn’t interest me how old you are.*
*I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool*
*for love*
*for your dream*
*for the adventure of being alive.*

*It doesn’t interest me what planets are squaring your moon...*
*I want to know if you have touched the centre of your own sorrow*
*if you have been opened by life’s betrayals*
*or have become shriveled and closed*
*from fear of further pain.*

*I want to know if you can sit with pain*
*mine or your own*
*without moving to hide it*
*or fade it*
*or fix it.*

*I want to know if you can be with joy*
*mine or your own*
*if you can dance with wildness*

*and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes*
*without cautioning us*
*to be careful*
*to be realistic*
*to remember the limitations of being human.*

*It doesn’t interest me if the story you are telling me is true.*
*I want to know if you can disappoint another*
*to be true to yourself.*
*If you can bear the accusation of betrayal*
*and not betray your own soul.*
*If you can be faithless*
*and therefore trustworthy.*

*I want to know if you can see Beauty*
*even when it is not pretty*
*every day.*
*And if you can source your own life*
*from its presence.*

*I want to know if you can live with failure*
*yours and mine*
*and still stand at the edge of the lake*
*and shout to the silver of the full moon,*
“Yes.”

It doesn’t interest me
to know where you live or how much money you have.
I want to know if you can get up
after the night of grief and despair
weary and bruised to the bone
and do what needs to be done
to feed the children.

It doesn’t interest me who you know
or how you came to be here.
I want to know if you will stand
in the centre of the fire
with me
and not shrink back.
It doesn’t interest me where or what or with whom you have studied.
I want to know what sustains you
from the inside
when all else falls away.
I want to know if you can be alone
with yourself
and if you truly like the company you keep
in the empty moments.

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Conclusion
In personal and professional life, we cycle from novice to expert and back again, each time working
through a new, unfamiliar layer. As we digest and resolve one layer, our confidence and abilities expand,
allowing us to tend to the next. Each layer represents an opportunity to move toward wholeness as we
retrieve and reintegrate those pieces of ourselves that were left in the shadows. As we move through these
layers of our humanity, the ability to articulate challenges dispels shame and isolation, and promotes an
ability to keep things in perspective (objectivity). Furthermore, with a greater ability to process and heal
the shame of old wounds and areas of incongruence, we recognize that difficult emotions are messages to
heed, not threats to avoid. We become willing to acknowledge the suffering that comes with being human.
As we acknowledge old wounds and areas of incongruence, we have an opportunity to heal them, and as a
result, we continue moving toward wholeness.

Developing sense of coherence and congruence shifts our orientation. Sense of coherence (our
orientation to the outer world) and congruence (our orientation to the inner world) enable us to articulate, to
process, and to resolve internal and external stimuli. We develop trust in our inner and outer resources,
knowing they are enough to manage the weather that comes and goes each day. We often find that events
are stimulating, even exciting, rather than stressful. External events are less likely to be threatening when
we feel connected and unconditionally regarded by others and by our higher self. We do not question
whether we have the resources we need to manage life. When we feel stressed, we are more likely to drop
into our inner world for self-soothing before we grasp onto external substances and activities for reprieve.

This curriculum describes several tools that nurture root systems, encouraging them to run deep,
allowing us to feel secure when external stressors/weather systems blow in. These feelings of safety
promote the desire to soothe our self, and a confidence that we have what it takes inside of us to manage a
variety of internal and external stimuli. As a result of a new-found confidence and mindful habits, we
interrupt the tendency to grasp onto activities and substances for soothing. When a desire to soothe
with external substances and activities arises, like a lighthouse, we receive the cue to recognize an opportunity
for further healing. Re-orienting ourselves to view mistakes and suffering as opportunities rather than
personal failings, provides the awareness and motivation necessary to adapt to external stimuli.

As we gain congruence (where our ‘real’ self and ‘ideal’ self converge), we can provide
unconditional positive regard. Inwardly, we express this through self-compassion and outwardly as
compassion; this acts as an antidote to the rampant personal and cultural shame that haunts many
caregivers. This works because when we believe that we have unconditional positive regard, we internalize it and as a result, we can mirror it to ourselves and then back onto others.

None of this work happens quickly, quite the opposite. Through fits and starts, good days and frustrating days, we make progress. A ‘progress not perfection’ approach keeps us moving forward, providing us with the strength and grace to practice self-compassion, and to trust the process, however long it may be. Our calling keeps us going, keeps us striving to be our highest and most authentic self. We then found ourselves yearning for inner and outer connection and driven by desire and love. Authentically aligning with our calling transforms the tasks that used to feel obligatory and mundane into worthy investments as we work toward a cause greater than ourselves.

As healthcare profession, if we understand our areas of vulnerability, we can address them. We can cultivate feelings of belonging and connection through an understanding that despite our hierarchical stations, we are equal in our humanity. As we immerse in our calling, we find ourselves celebrating others who step out in vulnerability to live theirs. As a collective, within healthcare communities of practice, the higher our sense of coherence and the more congruent we are, the deeper and stronger our roots will be, enabling us to navigate the many storms endemic in our work environments.

Finally, to sustain culture change, we require organizational visions that support and strive to manage the intensity of the external stressors, as even the deepest roots systems will not survive extreme weather conditions. We must promote environments where relationships of unconditional positive regard can flourish. A successful and sustainable approach to mitigate stressors and promote thriving is not an ‘either or’ approach. Rather, we must focus on both, developmental assets and environmental management. By giving voice to organizational and individual vulnerabilities, sharing a similar language, and working toward a common vision, we can make lasting change a reality.
Appendix A: A Summary of Core Factors and Developmental Tools

**Sense of Coherence (Orientation to world)**

- Achieving non-attachment/objectivity through mindfulness
- Confidence to navigate challenges before they become stressors
- Achieving balance between order and chaos
- Connection to others; Differentiating from other
- Aligning with nature and a larger purpose (meaning)

**Congruence (Orientation to Self)**

- Self-Compassion/Unconditional Positive Regard
- What rituals resonate with me?
- Inner world Connection to the higher self/power
- Healing wounds/trauma; Working with projections; Forgiveness
- What calls me? Who am I?
- Interrupting the stress response, resetting our biology

**Coming to Know through Tools/Rituals to Promote Sense of Coherence and Congruence Development. For example,**

ATTUNING: Pause Practice, Body Scan, Guest House, Gratitude, Optimism, Music, Loving-Kindness.


CLEARING: Breath (4x4, 4-7-8), Body (stretching/softening), Shake it off/exercise, stretching/softening, EFT, Chakras, Heart Filtering, Mind sweeping, Forgiveness.

ALIGNING: Loving-kindness, Gratitude, Authenticity, Meeting your Future Self, Calling, Visioning, Ikigai


