

Finding Calm through Mindfulness:

Many of us have likely noticed ourselves feeling unsettled and distracted as we face the many challenges, losses, uncertainties, and inconveniences associated with the pandemic. It is not unusual to experience this, particularly when we don't know what the future may bring. During times of elevated stress, our thoughts have a tendency to wander and race. We may find our thoughts connecting with the past as we grieve aspects of our lives that have been altered, disrupted and in some cases completely lost as a result of our global health care pandemic.

Distressing and anxiety provoking thoughts left unchecked can contribute to irritability, restlessness, distractibility, disrupted sleep patterns, and compromised decision making. Complete awareness in a given moment to these thoughts does not lend itself naturally to most of us, however practicing mindfulness can be a remedy for some of these problems. Mindfulness can provide an opportunity to pause and redirect our thoughts to the here and now. It is useful with alleviating and possibly protecting us from the negative impact of wandering thoughts, pervasive anxiety, and mindless thinking. Practicing mindfulness is a valuable skill for managing emotions and conflicts and factors for which we lack control over. When practiced regularly, mindfulness can be useful with restoring a sense of balance and calm. Research has increasingly linked the practice of mindfulness with higher levels of happiness and reduced stress levels. Consider the following strategies:

- **Pause:** Set aside several minutes to focus on the thoughts that you are having. Are your thoughts connected with the past or are they forwarding to the future and unknown? Gently redirect thoughts to the present. Notice if your thoughts are judgmental or critical. Look for opportunities to practice neutrality, kindness and compassion to self and others.
- **Relaxation Breathing:** Consider 2-4 breathing. Inhale slowly and slowly count to two. Then exhale slowly and slowly count to four.
- **Ground thoughts to present:** Look around your immediate surroundings and notice 3 objects you haven't noticed before or rarely notice. Then notice 3 colors, then 3 textures, then 3 smells.
- **Adaptive thinking:** Accept what you can of a situation and strive to let go of what you don't have control over or that which has already occurred.
- **Gratitude:** A small amount of gratitude can go a long way. Consider a daily gratitude journal. Identify 3 things you are grateful for daily.
- **Mindfulness Apps:** Consider the following mindfulness resources:
Apps: Headspace; Calm; Insight Timer; **Website:** PalouseMindfulness.com; **YouTube:** Mindful Breaks-2 Minute Re-Centering Mindfulness for De-stressing; **YouTube:** 5 Minute Guided Meditation by Breethe

Counselors at HelpPeople EAP are available for additional assistance with managing distressing and anxiety provoking thoughts and to further enhance mindfulness skills. Contact HelpPeople EAP at (315) 470-7447 to speak to an EAP counselor today.