MINDFUL SELF-RENEWAL

**Stress is part of engaging with life.** The mind and body are designed to handle stress – to rise to challenge. It’s through challenge that we grow.

Think about a time when you challenged yourself in order to accomplish something of value – completing a class, interviewing for a job, or doing your best to be a good partner or parent. Chances are the experience involved some stress – *and* that it moved you closer to the person you want to be and the life you want to live.

**Self-renewal counter-balances the effects of stress.**

Renewal is a way of recharging ourselves so we can live with vitality and zest, able to rise to challenges and respond to the day-to-day stress that comes with being alive.

**Renewal is a mindset and an intentional practice** that helps us recover from stress. It helps us recharge our energy, our focus, and sense of wellbeing. Certain renewal practices are known to be especially effective – things like *breathing deeply and slowly, moving the body, engaging the senses, time with loved ones, connecting to nature, laughing, singing…*

In technical terms, **renewal activates the *parasympathetic nervous system***, helping us feel calm, alert, and energized.

When we think of stress management, what often comes to mind is rest and relaxation. Rest means getting enough sleep. We need to rest *before* we can renew. When we’re exhausted or sleep-deprived, we don’t have the energy to engage in those things that are renewing.

Relaxation involves slowing down, allowing our selves to shift from doing into *being* – like taking a warm bath or watching the sunset. These kinds of activities help us recharge. Renewal can also be activating and even intense – like mountain biking or strength training or playing a challenging game of chess.

**Renewal activities elicit positive emotions.** We might feel inspired or excited or amused. We feel the emotions of love, or gratitude, or a sense of awe. Some are subtle, like a sense of contentment or inner peace. Generating positive emotions is a powerful way to ease stress.

**Why it matters**

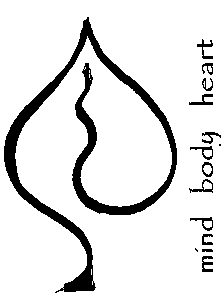
Renewal supports us in being:

* Focused and alert
* Able to think clearly and make wise decisions
* Resilient – able to rise to challenges and to bounce back
* Patient and understanding of ourselves and others
* Emotionally balanced and better able to regulate emotions

When we’re stressed, we sometimes try to recover in unhealthy ways like overeating, using tobacco, alcohol, or other substances, binge watching television, etc. Mindful self-renewal is a more conscious way of nurturing ourselves, a way of truly supporting our health and wellbeing.

**Renewal can be practiced anywhere, anytime**, ideally woven into our day-to-day lives. We can consciously shift into parasympathetic mode within moments, and in the midst of a busy day. Simply pausing to take a few deep breaths, and thinking of someone or something you appreciate is an example of a self-renewal practice. Listening (and moving) to a favorite song is another example.

Take a moment to think about your own life… ***What renews and recharges you?***

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*Questions for Reflection*

When do you feel most alive?

When do you feel most drained?

How does the stress in your life relate to your values –to your sense of purpose and meaning?

Do you take time to rest and recharge during the day – or put it off until the weekend?

What do you do to recharge?

What are some of the cues that help you recognize when you’re feeling stressed?

Do you manage stress in ways that are healthy or unhealthy – or both?

What healthy self-renewal activities can you commit to on a daily basis?

What will remind you to practice self-renewal?

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