

The Daily Check Ins Practice – by Julia Menard
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I've been exploring the topic of stress lately. It started last month, when I noticed I was more stressed than usual and booked myself a retreat and a massage. Those were lovely and replenishing and... still, there's been something missing as I went about my day-to-day living.

Around the same time, I began a new program which I am quite excited about. It's called "Emotional Brain Training" and it was started by Laurel Mellin - an Associate Clinical Professor of Family and Community Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of California at San Francisco. About 30 years ago, Laurel started working with obese children and their parents and found when she taught the parents and children a few "simple" skills - children seemed to spontaneously feel better, eat better, and exercise more.

Laurel's attention turned to applying these same tools to adults for the treatment of obesity, then for all stress symptoms, and finally to attaining high-level states of well-being. In the last 10 years, her method has evolved to integrate neuroplasticity, attachment theory and stress science. Her work aims to rewire the brain to mirror secure attachment. That is, the goal is to decrease the load we experience from expending energy to deal with chronic stress and treat the stress itself.

The program Laurel offers is quite simple at heart - though not necessarily easy.

One of the cornerstones of the program is what she calls Daily Check ins. The intention of the Check Ins is to increase your awareness of what is happening inside of you and increase your secure attachment to yourself.

The basic idea is a mindfulness practice: to learn to be aware of what you are feeling at any moment during the day.

The recommendation is to Check In at least 5 times a day and 10 times a day is the norm for those in the program. It's also better to check in at designated times, than randomly - as we tend to forget to check in on our feelings when we are more stressed.

One way to remember pre-determined times as you get started is to check in before getting out of bed, then before each meal, and before you go to sleep.

The Check In ritual is fairly prescriptive, based on attachment theory and how the brain re-wires itself. Here is the nuts and bolts of it:

The process starts with a big breath or two (already calming). That one practice

alone – if you remembered to take a few belly breathes a few times a day – is impactful!

In addition, you can add connecting with a "safe place" inside (the place we go to inside when our bodies feel at peace) as a second step.

Then you can observing yourself lovingly with a nurturing message.

Lastly, you can rate what level of stress you are at in the moment (on a scale of 1 - 5) and then accept yourself for whatever state you are in.

Although there are many other parts to this program, this one simple tool can be a profound addition to anyone's daily enjoyment of life. It has added a new level of peace to my life and has been part of what has been missing from my own "stress management tool kit."

I still value getting away on retreats, and booking my massages - they are important. And, I am also appreciating this way of being with myself - daily!

For more info on Laurel's method, check out: www.ebt.org

"Nothing can bring you peace but yourself." ... Ralph Waldo Emerson

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