WEEK 3

Reconnecting with our body as a parent

"There will never be another you"

Dr Edith Eva Eger

This week you will be exploring:

1. Bringing an exploratory attitude to stressful and unpleasant experiences
2. Self-compassion
3. Review the Mindful Minute
4. Connection with your child
5. How to use movement practice to explore limits, and cultivate concentration, strength and flexibility of mind and body

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
You must lose things,
Feel the future dissolve in a moment
Like salt in a weakened broth.
What you have held in your hand,
What you counted and carefully saved,
All this must go so you know
How desolate the landscape can be between regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
Thinking the bus will never stop,
The passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out
Of the window forever.
Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
You must travel where the Indian in the white poncho lies
Dead by the side of the road.
You must see that this could be you,
How he was someone
Who journeyed through the night with plans
And the simple breath that kept him alive.
Before you know the kindness as the deepest thing inside,
You must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow
You must speak to it till you voice
Catches the thread of all sorrows
And you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
Only kindness that ties your shoes
And sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
Only kindness that raises its head from the crown of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
And then goes with you everywhere
Like a shadow or a friend.

by Naomi Shihab Nye

Watching the Body During Parenting Stress

It is not unusual to feel pain in the body – maybe a backache or even a headache. It is also not unusual to try to ignore these sensations by taking medication to mask these uncomfortable experiences. The body holds a lot of information, so when you feel pain, usually this means that your body is trying to tell you something. It is vital that you start paying attention. The next time you experience pain in your body, try the following steps.

- Scan the body
- Pay attention, with a sense of curiosity, making no judgements as best you can
- If you notice discomfort or pain in a particular part of the body, pay attention to understand what is happening as precisely as possible
- Ask yourself: What is this sensation here right now? What is the feeling in my knee, my back, my leg?
- Exactly where is it? What qualities does it have? What is the shape of it?
- Soften and open to what is present. Holding all in a spacious container with acceptance of what is in this moment, not rejecting or holding onto anything
- Use the breath by imagining you are breathing into the area of intensity
- If you need to move, allow yourself to take a few more moments of exploration and then move your position mindfully as a response rather than a reaction
- Be open to outcome

When we are under parenting stress, watching the body and not taking action is particularly difficult. Notice what happens in your body and your breath when you race to school to pick up your children in time. Or how your body feels in the evening when you are trying to get your children off devices to eat dinner, or get your children to bed. Or in the morning when you are trying to get your children to school and the fear is rising that it might not happen today and you need to get to work. Or when you are angry with your child or worried about her or feeling anxious or critical with yourself as a parent. Or any time you notice the sensations in your body which tell you that you're feeling stressed.

We can also notice how our body feels during different parenting tasks. For example, what does my body feel like when I … bathe my baby? Help my son dress? Cook dinner for my family? Read to my daughter in her bed? Help my son with his homework? Put my daughter to bed? Lie in bed waiting for my teenager to come home late at night?

We can reconnect with our body sensations, and ourselves, *every* moment of the day.

Compassion with Yourself as a Parent

Compassion is the desire to alleviate suffering.

For most of us, feeling compassionate towards others comes naturally. When we notice that our child, a loved one, or a friend is in distress, we naturally feel sympathy and want to help alleviate their pain. Just as we console our child or a friend in distress, we can comfort, console, and soothe ourselves in difficult times and through difficult emotions.

Yet often we do not treat ourselves very compassionately when we are in distress. We may judge ourselves harshly when we feel we've made a mistake, or blame ourselves when sometimes goes wrong in our lives.

As parents, we may be self-critical when we find ourselves reacting impatiently to our children, or making the inevitable parenting mistakes. In contrast, if we were talking with a friend about the same situation, we would probably take a much more compassionate stance, even if we felt our friend had made a mistake.

In fact, it is exactly in these moments of suffering, when we've made a mistake, feel disappointed in ourselves, or when things have not gone as we hoped, that we are most in need of self-compassion.

Many of us, however, have learned to be critical of ourselves in these moments. *We may feel that a self-critical attitude is necessary to keep us performing at a high level, or that we deserve criticism when we've made a mistake or failed in some way.* Being kind and compassionate to ourselves may feel self-indulgent, or we may feel we don't deserve it.

Self-compassion practice means deliberately bringing kindness and compassion towards ourselves when we are suffering, especially when we feel we have made mistakes or done something wrong.

To understand self-compassion, it helps to think of how we would comfort a loved one who is feeling distressed. For example, imagine a friend is going through a divorce, and she comes to visit. What happens? First, you might notice that something is wrong – you see in her face that she is upset. Second, you would probably be kind and compassionate towards her, perhaps asking her what is wrong and offering support and encouragement. Finally, you might express empathy for her situation, sharing how you or others have been in a similar boat, and that she is not alone in her suffering. In this natural reaction, you will have experienced the three key ingredients to self-compassion.

When we practice self-compassion, we can use these three steps to guide us.

1. **Bringing mindful awareness to your suffering**: “This is a moment of suffering.” Notice any body sensations or habitual reactions, especially self-judgement.

1. **Bringing kindness to yourself**: We can say kind or comforting words, such as “This is really hard”; “you are doing the best you can”, or choose your own words. We can even comfort ourselves physically by putting our hands over our heart, giving ourselves a gentle hug around the shoulders, or massaging our neck. Research has shown that this kind of physical self-comfort releases oxytocin, the attachment and comfort hormone.

2. **Reminding yourself that this connects you to other parents**: “All parents struggle at times or make mistakes or have regrets. It’s only human”. All parents have suffered at some time or another.



From: Missing the Mark

Break your Heart No Longer

Each time you judge yourself, you break your heart.
You stop feeding on the love that is the wellspring of
Your vitality, but now the time has come, your time to live,
To celebrate and to see the goodness that you are.
There is no evil, no wrong in you or in any other.
There is only the thought of it and the thought has no substance.
If one comes in the name of truth, forgive the thought
For its unknowing. Do not fight it, just let it go
And breathe the goodness that you are.

Rumi