

Mindfulness Practices: ***A Personalized Wellness Booklet***

We all have to deal with stress on a daily basis. Stress will never go away for any of us. Stress may bring a lot of discomfort or pain or other kinds of experiences. While none of us can get rid of stress, we can learn how to better handle stress. This will help us to live healthier and, hopefully, happier lives!

Mindfulness practices (as known as “contemplative practices”) have been shown to:

- decrease stress
- lead to a better ability to handle stress
- lead to better attention and focus
- boost immune system
- provide mental health support and
- learn and practice resilience

Many of these practices can be done anywhere and at any time. Many of these are discreet practices, so if you happen to be around people, they probably won't know you're doing them – unless you choose to tell them. However, if you are in a quiet or personal space, or by yourself, that is just as good.

These practices can be used as a coping strategy or skill whenever you need or want them. However, science shows that **practicing one or more every day may increase the benefits you may experience.** These practices may help to increase our resiliency, health, and wellbeing on a daily basis. They can be used as strategies and skills during struggling moments, and maybe help change struggling moments into positive changes. Or, maybe you just use them to find just a little peace of mind.

Use one, some, or all of these practices whenever you feel curious about them, or when you find them useful or supportive!

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1. SENSORY OBSERVATION

This practice only takes a few moments. Sensory Observation helps to become aware of your surroundings, which may support you in feeling more grounded, balanced, or less stressed out. You may start by finding a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, or, maybe you practice this in a public area when you feel overwhelmed or stressed. You can practice this as many times per day as you choose. Repeat once, or more, if you choose.

- What are **5** things you can **see**?
- What are **4** things you can **touch**?
- What are **3** things you can **hear**?
- What are **2** things you can **smell**?
- What is **1** thing you can **taste**?

Notice how you feel after this practice. There is no right or wrong answer. Are there certain senses that are easier or harder to work through? If so, which ones?

Feel free to increase the number of items. Make it your own, if you like!

2. BREATH REGULATION

When we feel stressed out, overwhelmed, or maybe anxious, it may help to regulate your breathing. By using this strategy, we can tell our brains that we want to slow down our thoughts, feelings, emotions, or bodies. Below is one example of breath regulation; you can change the number of seconds to what feels useful for you. However, please try to make sure that your exhale (when you breathe air out) is *longer* than your inhale (when you breathe air in).

CHOICE 1

- Breathe IN for 4 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 6 seconds

Perhaps this doesn't feel useful for you. You can make it shorter, like in this example:

CHOICE 2

- Breathe IN for 3 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 4 seconds

Maybe you choose longer counts, like this example:

CHOICE 3

- Breathe IN for 4 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 5 seconds

CHOICE 4

If none of these feel useful for you, try matching the inhale and exhale, like this:

- Breathe IN for 3 seconds
- Breathe OUT for 3 seconds

There is no wrong or right number of seconds. Breathe in and out in whatever way feels most supportive or useful for your body. Just remember to breathe out (exhale) for a longer time than you breathe in (inhale), or make them equal.

How many seconds feel most useful for you (you can fill in the blank if you like)?

Inhale: _____

Exhale: _____

Are there any choices above that you would like to try, but haven't? Are there other choices that aren't listed that may be more useful for you? Maybe you can choose to try them next time!

If you would like an App to assist you with this practice, you may choose to:

Download the FREE app “BREATH BALL”:

Breath Ball is a free app that lets you choose how long to inhale and exhale for. There is a ball that shrinks then expands, so you can follow along as you breathe in and out. You can change the length of the inhale or exhale. You can also choose how long you want to practice in the Settings of the app.

3. GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Science shows that practicing gratitude (noticing what we're grateful for) can have positive impacts on our health and wellbeing. Science shows that gratitude may also help you to think clearer, increase sleep quality, or decrease sickness symptoms. Gratitude is another way of saying “what I'm thankful for”. There are several different ways to practice gratitude. Here are a few ways different people may practice gratitude, but feel free to come up with your own gratitude practice! What's most important is doing what *your* brain and body need!

a. **Gratitude Journal:** You don't need a fancy journal to write about gratitude. Just a spiral notebook or other inexpensive notebook is perfect. Try to write down 3 things you're grateful for every day. If that doesn't feel useful, maybe just try one thing per day when you start. If every day seems like it's too much, maybe try to write down what you're grateful for once per week. You can pick anything, big or small. At first, it may seem or feel silly to say, for example, “I'm grateful for my thumb”! However, being grateful for your thumb is just as good as being thankful for a new job, or a friend, or a favorite place.

b. **Gratitude Jar/Box:** Find a jar or box that you are willing to commit to gratitude. If you wish, you can decorate the jar or box, or make it your own, if that feels useful. Every day, or every week (or however often feels useful for you), take a small piece of paper and write 1-3 things (or more) you're grateful for. After you write it down, put the piece of paper in your Gratitude Jar or Gratitude Box. Keep going until the jar is full! You can create a new jar, or empty and reuse the

first one (save your gratitude notes, if you wish)! On days when you may feel down or stressed out, you can take out your Gratitude Jar/Box and read your gratitude notes!

c. **Gratitude Rock/Stone**: All this requires is you find a stone or rock. It can be the first one you find. Or, maybe you pick one based on its shape or how it feels. Maybe you pick it randomly, or maybe you pick one from a place that's special to you. Maybe you have a different small object that you prefer, instead. Once you find a gratitude rock, carry it with you throughout the day. Every time you see, touch, or notice your gratitude rock, think of one thing you're thankful for. Maybe carrying it all day doesn't feel useful for you. In this case, maybe you choose to only carry it once per week, or, maybe you choose to only carry it for a couple of hours each day. It's up to you! Whatever you choose is the perfect choice.

GRATITUDE PROMPTS

Here are some gratitude prompts may help to start your gratitude practice. You do not have to use these, but they are here to further support you. These may help you learn how to write a gratitude statement.

Try to identify 1-3 things in each category:

- I'm grateful for 1-3 things I see:
- I'm grateful for 1-3 things I touch/feel:
- I'm grateful for 1-3 things I hear:
- I'm grateful for 1-3 things I smell:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 things I taste:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 green things:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 places:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 people:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 animals/pets:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 sounds in nature:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 things in my home:
- I'm grateful for these 1-3 about myself:
- I'm grateful for these (#) (thing/people/place/etc.):
- I'm grateful for these (#) (thing/people/place/etc.):
- I'm grateful for these (#) (thing/people/place/etc.):
- I'm grateful for these (#) (thing/people/place/etc.):
- I'm grateful for these (#) (thing/people/place/etc.):
- I'm grateful for these (#) (thing/people/place/etc.):

Here are examples of gratitude statements:

"I'm grateful for my two cats and dog".

"I'm grateful for the color blue".

You can add reasons for why you're grateful, or names for whom you're grateful, if you wish.

Examples: "I'm grateful for my friend, Jane, because she's always there for me".

"I'm grateful for my favorite jacket because it keeps me warm".

Once you begin to practice gratitude, it may become easier over time. Note that it may change as you practice. If you want to, notice how you feel before you practice gratitude and after you practice gratitude.

Do you feel any different? Do you notice anything different about your body or brain? There are no right or wrong answers. Just think about noticing your thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc., if you think it is useful. Maybe they change over time, or maybe they don't.

4. BODY AWARENESS (BODY SCAN)

“This exercise asks you to...focus your attention on different parts of your body, from your feet to the muscles in your face. It is designed to help you develop a mindful awareness of your bodily sensations, and to relieve tension wherever it is found. Research suggests that this mindfulness practice can help reduce stress, improve well-being, and decrease aches and pains.

The body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting, or in other postures.

*The steps below are a guided meditation designed to be done **while sitting**.*

Especially for those new to the body scan, we recommend performing this practice with the audio.

However, you can also use the script below for guidance for yourself or for leading this practice for others.

*(Find the **FREE audio** version of the script at <http://marc.ucla.edu/mpeg/Body-Scan-Meditation.mp3>).*

Body Awareness Practice - Script:

1. Begin by bringing your attention into your body.
2. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.
3. You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.
4. Take a few deep breaths.
5. And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
6. You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.
7. You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.
8. Notice your back against the chair.
9. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.
10. Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight. See if you can allow them to soften.
11. Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.
12. Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.
13. Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
14. Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.
15. Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.”

***For a FREE 45-minute audio Body Awareness Scan, visit this website:**

<https://health.ucsd.edu/av/mindfulness/45MinBodyScan07mono.mp3>

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5. KINDNESS BOOSTERS

Science shows that kindness and wellbeing often go together. Kindness and compassion also go together. Being mindful and kind toward others can actually help *you* feel good or better. Being kind can be small or big. Maybe you buy a coffee for a friend, help a stranger in need, give someone a genuine compliment, volunteer for a cause you believe in, or practice self-love. All of these are Kindness Boosters.

Being kind is *not* same as being nice. Being nice is when you are polite to others, or, when you follow social norms and rules for how to treat people well. Kindness, on the other hand, is when you truly care about someone and your actions *show* that you care – including yourself! It’s possible to be kind and not nice; it’s also possible to be nice but not kind.

Keeping in mind how we define kindness, here are some action steps to show kindness to yourself and others.

Self-Love

When you hear “self-love”, you may think “stuck up” or “full of yourself”. But, that’s not what it means to practice “self-love”. Instead, *self-love is being mindful of who you are and being kind to yourself above all else*. When we practice self-love on a regular basis, studies show it increases our sense of wellbeing and our health. Self-love may help us to align our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, words, and actions, which is a concept at the core of mindfulness and contemplative practices. Even just 1 minute of self-love every day may support you in increased health, wellbeing, and resiliency.

Here are some ideas for Kindness Boosters for practicing self-love every day.

SELF-LOVE KINDNESS BOOSTERS:

- Start the day saying something positive about yourself. “I handled that situation well”, or, “I am enough”, or, “I am strong” are some examples. It can change, or it doesn’t have to!
- Fill your body with foods and drinks that are nourishing. Get plenty of water!
- Move your body in some way, every day. Even if it’s only 5 minutes of dancing or 1 push-up. A little exercise is more kind to your body than no exercise.
- Try not to compare yourself to others. There is no one like you. You are enough. Notice your strengths and maybe write them down, so you can remember them when you feel like you need a reminder. Notice how far you’ve come and what you’ve survived. Give yourself credit.
- It’s okay to feel angry, sad, helpless, or hurt. Notice when you feel these, and think of how you would treat your favorite person or animal if they felt like that. Do for yourself what you would do for your favorite person or animal.
- Practice gratitude.
- Forgive yourself. We all make mistakes or have regrets, and that’s okay. It’s also okay to forgive yourself for them, and maybe learn to not repeat them.
- Journal your thoughts and feelings, and try to let it be okay that you’re experiencing them.
- Have fun! Do something you love. Or, do something that’s just for you.
- Get in touch with your brain. Is it loving, encouraging and supportive? You deserve to tell yourself the loving, encouraging, and supportive things you would tell someone else.
- Get your favorite book, or a cup of tea, or just find a quiet place to tune out of the world. Take a few moments for yourself.

What ideas do you have to practice self-love for *your* brain and body?

Is there one, or more, thing(s) you can do for self-love every day?

KINDNESS BOOSTERS TOWARD OTHERS:

Studies show that when we practice kindness toward others, it can increase our own happiness as well. Kindness can be shown through actions.

- Give up your seat to someone who may need it more
- Hold a door open for someone
- Give a (sincere) compliment
- Make someone laugh
- Give someone a hug
- Take time to really listen to someone
- Make someone new feel welcome
- Let one car in on every journey/drive
- Give directions to someone who's lost
- Have a conversation with a stranger
- Pick up litter as you walk
- Let someone in front of you in the supermarket queue
- Tell someone they mean a lot to you

Acts of kindness (“Kindness Boosters”), no matter how big or small, promote happiness for others and for you!

What acts of kindness are present in your daily life?

Are there moments you can choose to practice kindness, where maybe you haven’t before?

5. MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION (MBSR)

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is just a big name for another form of mindfulness. Mindfulness and meditation are words that are often used to refer to the same concept:

Being aware of, and accepting, the present moment without judgement.

Practicing meditation and/or mindfulness is a proven way to reduce stress. Research shows more benefits when you practice more often and over time. There are several different types of meditation and mindfulness. MBSR is one type that has been studied a lot, and there are many different ways to practice it. When practicing these, it is best to find a quiet, safe and comfortable place where you will not be disturbed. If this isn't an option, then the safest place you can go is the best option.

Here are a few of these practices you may find useful, or may be curious to try:

a. **Focus Mindfulness (also known as “Single Point Awareness”)**

How: Practicing mindfulness with a focus involves looking inside ourselves to watch what is happening in your mind and brain. To keep your focus, it can be helpful to use something simple to keep yourself grounded in the moment. Follow **Breath Regulation** strategy, but add a point-of-focus, such as watching your breath or as small object you can hold, to help you gently bring your awareness back to the present moment.

b. **Awareness Mindfulness**

How: Unlike Focus Mindfulness, when we practice Awareness Mindfulness, we focus on the outside and what is around us. In other words, we use an “outside perspective”. When trying Awareness Mindfulness, try to notice or watch your mental activity as if it belonged to someone else.

In general, Awareness Mindfulness can be described as looking at your thoughts and feelings from outside of your usual experience. Instead, you watch or observe your mind as a stream of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and sensations, without judging any of it.

Here is a sample of Awareness Mindfulness. You can follow the script by yourself at home, if you want to. Use **Breath Regulation** for this practice as well.

Awareness Mindfulness – A Sample Practice Script

Start by taking your mind inwards for a moment by focusing on the breath. Take a few gentle deep breaths, from the belly. In and out. Re—lease your muscles if you find that useful...Continue to breathe in and out for as long as you wish.

Now take your mind outwards. See your thoughts, feelings, moods, and sensations as experiences. Let your body and brain feel like a field of experience...where they come and go, or change or repeat. ...Simply watch without judgment or analysis. Just watch them pass. Take a few moments or as long as you want...

Now pick one experience (thought, feeling, mood, sensation). Let the other sensations and thoughts go by in the background. Note any new thoughts or feelings that arise from observing this experience. Sit with these thoughts and feelings and this experience for a moment.

Whenever you're ready to leave this experience behind, think again of your brain and body as a vast field of experience. Simply let this experience pass through. Take one, or a few, deep breaths...and maybe just notice how you feel.

c. Walking Mindfulness

You may practice Walking Mindfulness inside or outside. Walking mindfulness is just another tool for us to give our body some time and space. All it involves is giving your focus to your body as you walk, and noticing different sensations or feelings. You may wear shoes or not. It's your choice!

Inside: If there isn't much room, pick an area where you can walk back and forth a few times.

Outside: Pick your favorite spot. Or, maybe it's right outside your front door. Just find an area that you find beautiful or useful for this practice.

How to Practice Walking Mindfulness:

- Try to walk slowly OR walk at a normal leisurely pace for you (if you don't have much room inside, walking very slowly may be more useful).
- Try to match your breath to your steps.
- Notice the sensations you feel as your foot moves from heel to toe, when you take a step.
- What does the ground or floor feel like?
- Maybe observe *how* you walk. Do you feel movement in your hips or arms? Somewhere else?
- Is it difficult to walk slow, or it is easy?
- How do your shoulders feel (tight? Loose?)?
- Do your feet feel different when they are on the ground, versus mid-step when the foot is in the air?
- What else do you notice about your body or breath as you walk?

- Whenever you feel done, try to take one big (but gentle!) breath in, and then breathe all the air out.
- Maybe take a moment to notice how you feel now compared to before your practice. Maybe it's different, and maybe it's not! Either way is perfect.

(The Mindful Word, 2012; Adapted on 3/4/19 by Heather Saxon, M.A., RYT-200)

6. YOGA

Science has shown that yoga can change parts of our brain and body for the better, especially over time. People who practice yoga on a regular basis tend to have better overall health and increased wellbeing. It may even help to relieve some pain or illness in your body. It may also support clearer thinking and a better ability to handle difficult emotions.

The word ‘*Yoga*’ means “to yolk” (in the Sanskrit language), or, in other words, it means “to unite”. We don’t have to practice super fancy forms, like the ones on yoga magazines or in the movies. Any person, regardless of shape, size, gender, or ethnicity/race can practice yoga! If we think about yoga, and what it means to “unite”, there are many examples:

- Uniting your breath and body by breathing in sync with your body movements.
- Uniting your thoughts, beliefs, words, and actions.
- Uniting in your community.

What else might yoga, or, “to unite”, mean to you?

If you find it useful, try to use Breath Regulation during yoga as well. The more we breathe deeply while we practice yoga forms, the more beneficial it may be.

Below is a series of forms. You don’t have to do them in any certain order, and you don’t have to do all of them. Pick the ones that you are curious about or that feel useful for you!

YOGA FORMS



Mountain Form

1. Stand tall with feet together.
2. Gently bring the shoulders down and back.
3. Try to make your weight evenly distributed through your feet soles. Arms at your sides.
4. Take a deep breath and raise your hands overhead. Have your palms face each other, and keep your arms straight (gently).
5. Reach up toward the sky with your fingertips.
6. Take a few deep breaths. Stop when you find it useful to stop. Stay as long as you like!



Photo credit: fitnessmagazine.com
Photo credit: fitnessmagazine.com

Downward Dog Form

1. Start with hands and knees on mat. To protect your body, try to make sure your hands are directly under shoulders. Also make sure your knees are under your hips.
2. Walk hands a few inches forward and spread fingers wide, pressing palms into mat.
3. Curl toes under and slowly press hips toward ceiling, bringing your body into an upside-down V, pressing shoulders away from ears. Feet should be hip-width apart, knees slightly bent.
4. Hold for 3 full breaths. Or, for however long feels useful for you.

Another way to practice this form is to use a chair or other stable surface for your hands. This version of the form can take pressure off of the wrists, shoulders, and back. Still follow directions above.



Photo credit Tara Marchiori, Chasing Light Studio

Both forms are equally beneficial!



Photo credit: fitnessmagazine.com

Warrior Form

1. Stand with legs 3 to 4 feet apart, turning right foot out 90 degrees and left foot in slightly.
 2. Bring your hands to your hips and release your shoulders (gently make space between your shoulders and ears).
 3. Extend arms out to the side with palms (hands) down.
 4. Bend right knee 90 degrees, keeping knee over ankle.
 5. Gaze out over right hand.
- Stay for 1 minute, or however long feels useful for you.
6. Switch sides and repeat.

Inner thigh



Photo credit: fitnessmagazine.com

Tree Form

1. From standing, bring weight into your right foot.
2. Pick up your left foot and take the sole of your foot to the inner calf (or ankle or thigh) and your knee out to the side (see labeled pictures).
3. Reach arms overhead.
4. Hug to the midline of your body by pressing your foot into your leg and your leg into your foot.
5. Pick one spot to look at to help you maintain your balance.
6. Hold for two breaths or as long as you like!
7. Repeat on the other side.

Inner calf



Photo credit: Tara Marchiori,
Chasing Light Studio

Inner ankle



Inner thigh
(2nd example)



Photo credit: 303magazine.com



Photo credit: shutterstock.com

Seated Twist Form

1. Sit on the floor with your legs extended.
 2. Cross right foot over outside of left thigh; bend left knee. Keep right knee pointed toward ceiling.
 3. Place left elbow to the outside of right knee and right hand on the floor behind you.
 4. Twist right, moving from your abdomen; keep both sides of your bottom on the floor. Only twist as far as feels safe to you!
 5. Make space between your ears and shoulders, by gently bringing your shoulders down and back.
 6. Take a few deep breaths and stay for as long as you like!
 7. Switch sides and repeat.
- *A different way to practice the form: Keep bottom leg straight and place both hands on raised knee. If your lower back rounds forward, sit on a folded blanket.



Photo credit: fitnessmagazine.com

Child's Form

1. Sit up comfortably on your heels.
2. Roll your torso forward, bringing your forehead to rest on the floor (or bed) in front of you.
3. Lower your upper front body as close to your knees as you comfortably can.
4. Extend your arms in front of you, or, place them gently by your sides.
4. Hold the form and breathe for as long as you like!

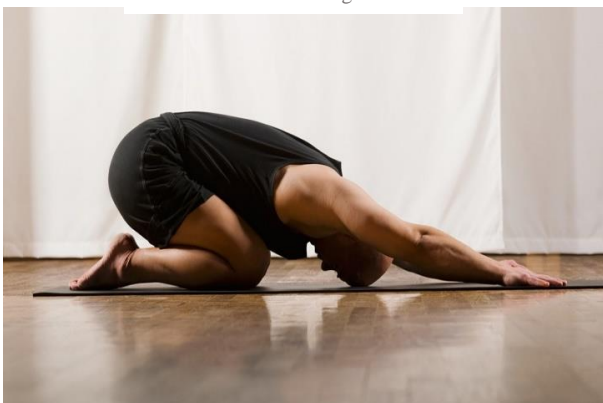


Photo credit: shutterstock.com



Photo credit: happytreeyoga.com

NOTE: You do *not* need a yoga mat to practice yoga. You just need enough space so you can move your body freely without accidentally moving into something around you. You *don't* need yoga pants or “yoga clothes”. Just wear whatever feels comfortable to you! For example, sweatpants and a t-shirt is a comfortable option, but you may choose to wear whatever you want! If you feel pain at any point, please stop.

*Always consult your physician before trying or incorporating any new exercise(s) into your life.

7. SELF AFFIRMATION PRACTICE: *Values & Strengths*

“We all have stories about ourselves formed by life experiences and relationships. We tell ourselves these stories, and we show the details of these stories to other people through our words and actions. Our stories reflect our values and strengths”.

Studies show that self-affirmation practices (or ‘exercises’) can improve education, health, and relationship outcomes. Some of these benefits can last for months or even years!

“Sometimes life feels like it’s going well, and our story feels just fine. Maybe we feel good about who we are and who we’re becoming. But, other times we may overlook our values and skills. Maybe we feel defeated. Or, sometimes we may have mistakes or regrets that are hard to acknowledge. This may make us close ourselves off. Soon, the stories we tell ourselves, about ourselves, can become full of problems and threats.

The stories we tell ourselves about our life don’t always match what others see in us, either. We may make details seem small, when others find them big or meaningful.

We may see ourselves as we were in the past and forget to notice, and thank ourselves, for the important changes we’ve made. We can be harsh to ourselves and believe that others see us the same way.

When our story about ourselves is limited in this way, it may feel like we have few to zero choices for how to cope with tough situations. Our stories may only allow for a few solutions. We may default to strengths and values that don’t always help, too. For example, we may rely on our skills of planning when there is nothing that can be planned. We end up feeling even worse.

When we are angry, we may focus on our value of justice. Instead of resolving the conflict, we can get stuck on what is fair. We can lash out or seek retaliation. Again, we can end up feeling even worse.

What could be different if we could expand our stories?

There is one simple practice that you can try for yourself: self-affirmation. Studies show that when we practice self-affirmation, we are better able to handle life’s difficulties and learn from our mistakes.

A simple way to do this is to identify your values and strengths. Then, choose one to investigate. You can think of it like directing a scene in a movie, or writing a chapter in a book, about your life. How would this strength or value be portrayed? For example, maybe you value your creativity. You would

then think back through your life and explore how creativity became important to you. Then you would list the ways that you have shown your creativity, and think about ways you can use it to solve problems.

The key to this practice is to choose something of meaning and value to you. It is also helpful to look beyond the part of you that feels threatened. For example, if your creativity feels threatened, it may be helpful to explore other parts of yourself instead.

When you do this, you can broaden your understanding of yourself. You can move beyond the threat or challenge before you, and you notice and identify your internal and external resources”.

SELF-AFFIRMATION PRACTICE

What are 3 of your values and/or strengths? Try to make sure they have meaning for you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List the different ways your values and strengths show through your actions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How can you use your values and strengths to solve problems?

1. _____

2. _____

