



The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom
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How Your Children Learn

Executive Functions: The New Intelligence

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A new school year is beginning once again. This will be met with optimism and delight for the fresh beginnings and opportunities that await your child's development or with dread by those whose children's school-related experiences are fraught with difficulties.

Children whose school experiences are positive will impact their parent's lives relatively minimally. They will rise each morning easily with a cooperative attitude for the new school day. Parents will receive compliments from the teacher about their children's progress. Homework will be completed with minimal fuss and mostly life will continue with a basic equanimity.

But many children, for a variety of reasons, will not have positive school experiences and the above scenario will look quite different. Getting ready for school in the morning will be a habitual struggle, with frustration and emotional turmoil endured by both parent and child. Homework will become a battleground. Not only will compliments be lacking, you might instead receive phone calls from the teacher listing the various crimes and misdemeanors of your little loved one.

What is a parent to do? Have you heard of Executive Functioning skills?

This may sound complicated but it's just a term for what is now being called the New Intelligence. Unrelated to business, the expression actually comes from neuroscience and refers to the brain-based skills required to "execute" a task or achieve a goal. These processes, located in the frontal cortex, essentially direct the activity of other functional regions of the brain.

Most importantly, children need these abilities to succeed in school, to make learning possible and to

get along with others. We all need these skills, for success at work, for maintaining our relationships, particularly intimate ones, and for parenting our children. These abilities lead us to healthy mental qualities and a state of overall well being.

Now at this point you are probably asking, “What exactly are these amazing abilities?”

They are: Sustained Attention
Working Memory
Organization
Planning/Prioritizing
Time Management
Goal Setting/ Goal Persistence
Metacognition
Flexibility
Emotional Control

This is a list of what one needs to work at learning. It is interesting that these have long been recognized in the world’s secular and religious traditions as important qualities of character. But it’s only recently that they have been researched by scientists and become the focus of formal training programs in modern settings, including schools.

Greetings

The Wise Brain Bulletin offers skillful means from brain science and contemplative practice – to nurture your brain for the benefit of yourself and everyone you touch.

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[Rick Hanson, PhD](#) edits the Bulletin, and this issue is designed and laid out by the managing editor, [Michelle Keane](#).

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So what has taken us so long? Why does our educational system continue to perpetuate learning models based on 19th and early 20th century values? Why has brain- based learning been completely left out of the equation?

As a school psychologist in NYC public schools for 11 years, I administered countless IQ Tests. These tests and their revered numbers, were the Holy Grail by which children were either deemed intelligent or inadequate. It didn’t take long before I was finding the use of these tests objectionable. I questioned the inconsistencies of the subtests and how that all mighty number was arrived at. For example, in testing for what was a child’s fund of word knowledge, it wasn’t acknowledged that also being measured was the child’s auditory short-term working memory. Perhaps, if given a visual vocabulary test, that same child might score completely differently. As in the classroom, this test did not acknowledge underlying brain structure or the cognitive processes that allows the vocabulary knowledge to be registered or produced.

And that is only one tiny example of how a child is sometimes misunderstood by a bureaucratic system lacking the Executive Function skills of flexibility and metacognition.

As with many things we assign meaning to, the IQ test itself isn't bad. If used as a way to understand how students processed information, then there was value. But mostly what I saw was that this test was used to obtain special education services, such as extra academic help, which required labeling and thus pathologizing the child. It might also be used to isolate the student in a separate and not equal, special education class. It certainly wasn't the most compassionate or even effective way to help children.

And then I began to receive trainings in Executive Functions, which opened up an entirely new way to perceive children and their abilities. I saw an approach that transformed the basic assumptions about children's ability to learn. No longer shackled with the identity of an immutable IQ number, with little hope for meaningful development, I realized that Executive Function's were brain processes that could be trained and strengthened. Effort could lead to ability. This was an educational model that was optimistic and empowering of both student and teacher.

Here are the cliff-notes on how Executive Functions play out in learning, academic achievement and life in the classroom. They are important to be aware of even if your child is progressing smoothly because development rarely takes a straight path. Furthermore, for our own sakes, having awareness of Executive Function abilities may aid us one day in life's inevitable challenges.

Notice how certain processes fall together in clusters and work inter-connectedly. See if your or your child's thinking and behavior are described below.

- **Sustained Attention** or ability to concentrate and focus is essential for accomplishing any meaningful work. It is a huge subject, warranting its own article. From pre-school onward there is a demand for the child to concentrate and reduce distraction. As early as 1st grade in a highly structured school, the student must be able to sustain attention even when disinterested.



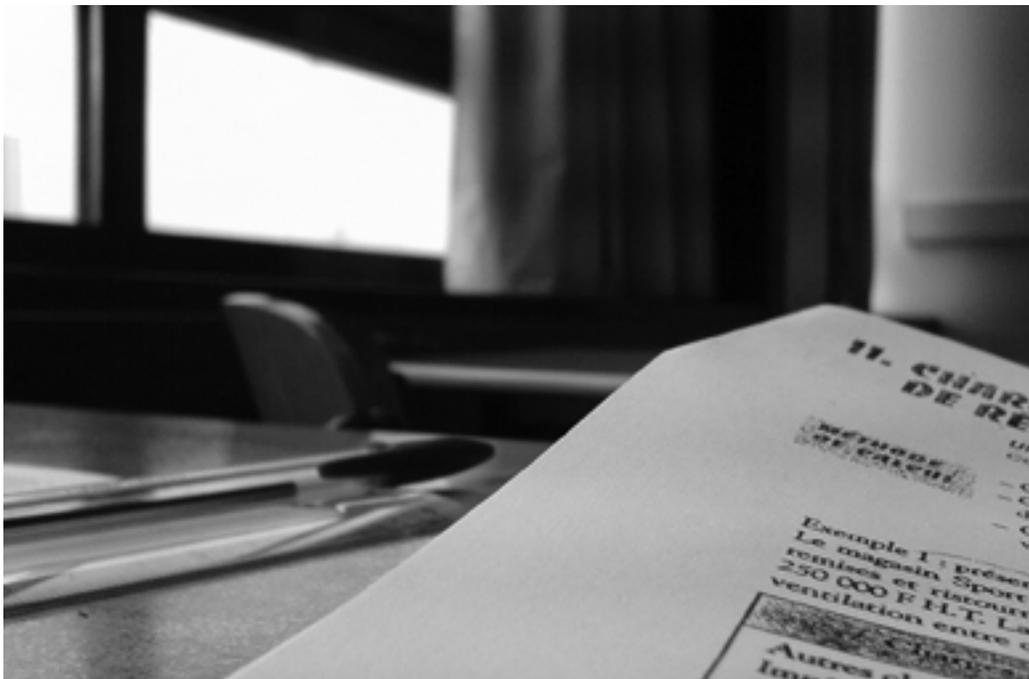
Learning and achievement involves attention to detail. If unfocused and easily distracted, a student can miss or skip over important details such as letters in a word or numbers in a math problem. Making detail errors on tests or homework assignment can lead to chronic poor performance and the teacher's perception of that student as less able than perhaps his or her actual potential.

Sustaining attention is required to finish reading a book or completing a writing task. In fact all academic tasks require this ability to remain focused and attentive over a prolonged period of time.

- **Working Memory** is a function that is required as early as pre-school where children must follow multi-step directions and comply with routines. Reading, math, writing and spelling requires remembering sequences. The memory load increases considerably in grade 2 and continues throughout the school years.

A weakness in working memory can make a child's school-life miserable. As a muscle can be weak, so can a neural memory connection or pathway. Academic subjects requiring a lot of information to be kept in memory may overwhelm a student. Social studies and science are such subjects. Add language demands of this "content driven curriculum" and you can have an exasperated child who tunes out due to the overload. These kids are truly misunderstood.

- **Organization** goes hand-in-hand with many of the other executive processes. To be organized requires remembering and not forgetting, staying focused and not becoming distracted, planning,



persistence and emotional regulation skills. Few adults need to be told about the benefits of an organized home, workspace or for that matter, an organized mind. It takes effort and repetition to maintain.

In the classroom, a disorganized student's notebook or desk is chaotic. Numbers in a math problem may not be written in straight, lined up columns, setting the child up for failure. Some children need help organizing information and ideas.

When it comes to material disorganization I try to think about this phenomena as life always changing and evolving. It is too easy to become annoyed and frustrated with the constant chores and reminders to our kids to “Clean Up!” If viewed with a degree of acceptance, the bad feelings we create can be reduced. But that takes a few executive skills further down this list.

- **Time Management** clusters with Planning/Prioritizing and of course, Organization. It also requires self-awareness and emotional control. Young children are largely helped by teachers and parents to manage time so this ability is less apparent. However, adolescents who are expected to work more independently are plagued with time-planning problems. Many academic tasks,



particularly in middle and high school, are highly dependent upon the Executive Function skills of planning ahead, estimating and allocating time and pacing oneself for meeting deadlines. It also requires the ability to delay rewards inherent in attractive distractions. Do you know any teenagers like this? Without teacher or parent management, staying within time limits can be impossible for many adolescents. Let's face it; it's hard for us all.

- **Planning and Prioritizing** is a way to organize information and time. With no plan of action a student may approach tasks impulsively and chaotically, unable, for example, to produce a worthwhile written paper on time. This Executive Function can be considered right alongside Time Management, which is critically important in middle and high school.
- **Goal Setting** acts as a guide and structure. It is a way to hold you accountable to a task. When students set their own goals, self-responsibility, motivation and commitment increases. It involves making decisions.

This is not taught explicitly in school, but is a skill that can be learned from an early age. Parents can help their children establish an approach to homework and studying that contains goals. Of course any accomplishment your child wishes to achieve will be helped through a clear realistic plan that includes an aim or desired result. In Buddhism, setting an intention or goal with commitment to action is seen as a mental balance having central importance to all other mental states. Western psychological theory and research supports this idea as well.

- **Goal Persistence** means staying on task. Effort and self-discipline is required but motivation makes goal completion much easier. Some parents and educators use tangible and verbal rewards. I believe children will gain enormous life-long benefit by experiencing completed goals as intrinsically gratifying. To do this, praise effort but keep material rewards for other occasions.
- **Metacognition** is the mind's capacity to think about one's own thinking, to ask, "How am I doing?" It is a mindfulness practice, a method of self-examination. This Executive Function allows standing back and observing how oneself is solving a problem, which also includes thinking about one's emotions or behavior. Explicit teaching of how emotions influence thoughts and perceptions and that emotions change over time will strengthen the child's metacognitive capacity. This is significant because the child learns that one's belief about the self can be changed.
- **Flexibility** allows for openness, freedom of choice, adaptability and resilience. It is a way to care for both your mind and heart.

Flexibility is needed to revise plans, to recover from making a mistake, for problem solving and considering the possibility of many solutions. It is needed when new information is presented or a condition changes. It is both a thinking and doing ability.

If you have a meditation practice that is based in "letting go", you will notice that the more flexibility you have the easier it will be to detach from interfering thoughts and feelings. A benefit of meditation is increased mental and emotional flexibility.

In the classroom, children must have the mental and emotional flexibility to transition between activities or to a new environment, such as the lunchroom. As the grades increase, the curriculum changes from one usually taught in small linear sequences to more "open-ended" learning tasks. This requires middle and high schoolers to handle multiple resources of information, deal with ambiguity, to make many mental connections. There is tremendous need for this particular Executive Function.

- **Emotional Control** is another enormous topic. It may be useful to think about this Executive Function process as self-regulation involving impulse control. It goes without saying that this ability is needed throughout the life span. Every Executive Function discussed so far is either weakened or promoted by this capacity.

In school, it is critical for educators to recognize that some problematic behaviors are associated with learning or social adjustment difficulties. Brain-based type teaching will assume the structural



and functional brain differences in children and reduce the personalizing of a child's non-compliant behavior. It is the responsibility of both parent and teacher to address the specific needs of children with emotional control difficulties with compassionate and effective interventions. Schools need to understand the complexity of human differences. Without this awareness, children who fall outside narrow borders of acceptability will experience their education as a very painful imposition.

The Executive Function demands in the classroom are appearing at younger ages due to more academically focused schools. A high performing elementary school I worked in had kindergarten children taking tests and sitting silently with their hands folded. Block building was looked upon with disdain.

As your child starts school this September, think about whether these Executive Function processes help or hinder his or her school experiences. If you do find yourself needing to advocate for your child, first examine your own Executive Function skills. Look to see where your strengths are and what might need some development. Most of us have a range of strengths.

Your knowledge of Executive Functions is important because your child's teacher may not be aware of them. Teachers are largely trained in Instruction with an emphasis on getting the academic content into the child's head. But many public schools are in trouble because they haven't yet recognized that instruction and content is actually secondary to knowing how the brain enables children to learn.

So in advocating for your child, your own Executive Function ability will need to be operating well. Schools say they want parent participation, but many school administrators want you, just like your child, to not make waves. Hold your agenda with a light heart. Be flexible. Remember compassion for the teacher who is probably struggling with conforming to the rules as much as you are.

The focus of this article has largely been the role of the brain's Executive Functions in relationship to children's learning and life in school. I hope you have found this offers a new and useful perspective from which to view your child's mental and emotional development.

In closing, I would like to leave you with one last thought. Executive Function capabilities are not simply ways to succeed in school or on the job. They are skills that make it possible for us to engage life with both mental and emotional balance and thereby flourish. They enable the achievement of personally



meaningful intentions that can strengthen our resiliency while being good for others. As I see it, Executive Functions comprise many of the abilities that make for a 21st century type of intelligence. Perhaps with continued skillful effort, we as individuals and as a global community could actually be capable of achieving a wise brain. Now, isn't that an idea to ponder and a goal to pursue?

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Shelley Krapes-Mackinnon is a nationally exhibited artist, NYU trained school psychologist and developmental learning consultant. Her work with children and their teachers in NYC public schools spans 22 years.



Beginning as a teaching artist, Shelley created high quality art programs in schools lacking such curriculum. As a school psychologist, art and a love of neuroscience imbued her clinical counseling and special needs evaluations. She has also worked directly with teachers in classrooms as a learning consultant and has conducted numerous professional development workshops.

Shelley is the founder of The Creativity and Learning Workshop, an alternative art-based learning center about to launch in Brooklyn, N.Y. (Stay posted for website.)

Her artwork, articles and ideas have appeared in Learning to Teach, Weaving, A Handbook of the Fiber Arts, Creative Classroom, Fiberarts and Craft Horizons magazines. Write to her at: [shelley@thecreativityandlearningworkshop.com](mailto:shelley@thecreativityandlearningworkshop.com).

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for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom***

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# Am I On

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The Duke

Am I on? This is Kris from LA  
Go ahead, Kris from LA, you're on

Hey Mr B, long time listener  
First time caller!  
Namaste—what's on your mind this morning, Kris?

I caught your show by accident a while back...

Isn't that how everything usually happens...?

Well, yeah, I pretty much agree with...

I hear a big but coming up, Kris!

Well, Mr B, you kinda got one thing...er...ass-backwards...

Most things are backwards, Caller

Yeah, sure, but...

Caller Kris, we're coming up to a 45 minute break....

OK, you know, you say, like, all things arise, all things pass away...?

That tag line's been popular for 2500 years, Kris!

Yeah, sure, it is good, but....

I knew it!

But should be  
All things pass away, all things arise

Ok , Kris from LA, I'm listening...

Here in LA, that passing away thing?...I mean...you know...

There could be an accident, like on the 405?

Mr B, you know, somebody's just driving to work,  
and yet

And yet  
somebody else drives too fast,  
they can't stop, maybe somebody's friend's car gets hit real bad  
somebody's most dear friend passes away...  
somebody that somebody has loved for a long long time?  
All things pass away....That's The Duke, isn't it Mr B?  
You said that, always, the Duke of Life is always there

Yes, Kris, I said something like that...

Then something else will arise, always, you said.

I promise you something else will arise, Kris. I promise you.

That helps me a lot. It does, it really does.

But when, Mr B?

But when?

You there, Mr. B?

I'm here...Kris in LA, don't hang up

You hold on till after the break, OK?



Rob Timineri lives on a houseboat in Sausalito. Most of his poems are about the Dharma, wild creatures, or a combination of the two. He photographs birds, especially Western gulls and volunteers at WildCare, a wild animal hospital, in San Rafael, CA. You can contact Rob at [robertpaulconnect@gmail.com](mailto:robertpaulconnect@gmail.com).

# *Mindfulness Practice and TBI: The Gold Mind Meditation Project*

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“Until you have the inner discipline that brings calmness of mind, external facilities and conditions will never bring the joy and happiness you seek. On the other hand, if you possess this inner quality, it will be possible to live a happy and joyful life.”

– Dalai Lama

“Notes to our much loved son, Had - a time of agony, love, sense of loss and hope, encouragement and realization that you have been given life because of your unfulfilled destiny.”

– Starting lines from the Journal kept by my father, H.C. Walmer D.O. at UC Davis Hospital at time of my auto accident Dec. 31, 1977.

This is the story of an auto accident resulting in my Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) all those years ago. Modern medicine has become very good at enabling us to survive a wide range of traumas that previously lead to death. We, as survivors of TBI, have had a world shattering experience. With Mindfulness practice that I will describe we can learn to befriend our new lives, join with others and find ease in the present moment. Healing is possible. Here's my story.

I was riding in a car with friends, returning to Oregon from California after my college's winter break. Traveling north on the interstate we crashed into a car that had missed its exit and was backing up on the road. At 66 mph we impacted, crushing the right side of the car where I was seated. My head, with glasses slammed into the dashboard and Jaws-of-Life were required to free me from the vehicle. I was rushed to an Emergency Room in a coma.

My brain swelled in my skull. This was before state seat-belt laws, as well as the current medical relief mitigating the critical intracranial pressure of brain swelling. In six days, with the powerful help of my parents and formal medical care, I regained consciousness. I had amnesia, diplopia



(double-vision w/ anisocoria, maximally dilated pupils), and severe TBI. I walked with great difficulty. In the short instant of this accident I was not who I used to be. My life was dramatically and forever changed.

I went home with my parents and slowly recuperated. Repeated Osteopathic treatments aided balance and motor coordination issues improved over time. Often I was in a foggy mental state, with occasional glimpses of clarity. Plans for my future existed only as fleeting positive images in my mind. That following fall I went back to college thinking my life would be just the same as my previous times there. Not so. It wasn't. Those plans and images were now derailed, couldn't get back on the tracks. I had great difficulty learning and people didn't relate to me as they once did. I struggled with an array of

unfamiliar cognitive deficits. I was back at the same place with a different me. This condition of TBI was only vaguely recognized.

New frustrations arose to surprise me. My romantic relationship split up, as I would often rage out of control within, emotionally and couldn't figure it out. Anger would grab my sensibilities. My ability to be a fast study was gone; I now had a memory that was effectively Teflon for new facts. Frustration was a persistent undercurrent of my entire life.

Boundary issues and very slow mental processing made for a whole new mix in

my social and personal world. Who was I now? In short I needed to learn to befriend a new me, a newcomer to the land of TBI.

Fortunately in 1982 I met a wonderful and highly supportive woman. She encouraged me to complete my college degree, get work and we eventually married. She already had a wonderful son and we had two more incredible children and I cannot say enough about the treasure and contribution of our empowering and loving family relationship. As I lost one job after another I met and came to know more of my cognitive deficits. Many relationships break up with TBI. I was so fortunate in marrying this woman who has been strongly capable of holding all that occurred (super mother). As well and quite unbeknownst to me, she, with her character, was actually providing my missing executive functions.

Ten years after the accident, a friend said, "I'm going out to Spirit Rock this evening to sit with Jack Kornfield in meditation. You might like it." Curious, I went and followed the sitting meditation instructions. In a matter of weeks I had experiences of peace and energy. I was inspired. I knew I was capable of learning the beneficial qualities I heard spoken of in the Dharma Talks. I regularly went to the Monday evening meditation sits at Spirit Rock with Jack Kornfield and other dharma teachers. I find

all of the “seven factors of awakening” coming into play now in this practice: investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, and mindfulness. This tangible result fuels my practice. I know that it makes difference for me to do it. It’s self-motivating: participate and learn this skill and get positive benefit.



Meditation is a very forgiving practice. It’s ‘win win’, you practice skillfully or learn what’s needed. That’s the actual process. Losing track of being attentive with a meditation object and going off into worlds of thought is a natural phenomenon of the mind. That is exactly what minds do and as a person meditating we get to simply observe this as a regular process. Wise instruction here is noticing what the mind has done and bringing attention back to the chosen object, say breathing or the body. When the mind wanders into thinking you haven’t done something wrong, you are gently developing the practice of mindfulness as people have done for thousands of years. Now, I am fruitfully bringing this practice to bear on all my life experiences. I savor being mindfully present with various life experiences, pleasing and unpleasing – yes, both sides. This is not living in fantasy, rather being present with things as they are – feeling emotions and all else as that arises within us and communicating honestly.

Regular meditation practice has brought deepened levels of clarity and awareness to how I relate to my self and world. I am more able to hold sustained attention to any chosen activity. I practice everyday either with time sitting or in being awake to the moments of my life experience. With this mindfulness I can accept and gently hold whatever states arise in my consciousness or know that if I’m overloaded, to back off. The mind can be a crazy beast. This training grounds me in a sense of dignified inner wellness and peace including the damages of TBI. Mindfulness practice isn’t about changing me into a better me, rather it’s about befriending who I am. Healing (neuroplasticity) is a long process. Mindfulness and meditation open me to energy and the choice I have in this moment to see clearly the effects arising from my TBI and then be more appropriate in my actions. Not throwing gas on the flames.



TBI is still very much a part of my daily life. It hasn't gone away or been miraculously cured. I have learned to live skillfully with poor short-term memory. Emotional outbursts pass more quickly as I can see them, know they will pass and stop denying them. I have continuing difficulty with interpersonal boundaries. Though I am bright and cheerful, good at getting jobs, I continue to lose them. I identify with all of this much less and that gives me much peace and ease.

My wife and I are now 'empty nesters.' I savor the sweet memories of our children growing up as well as the amazing adults they now are. I've been practicing on this path for 23 years. Last year I had a 'Bodhisattva insight' (Buddhist noble goal, contributing to others) and with my dear wife's encouragement I formulated this mindfulness meditation project. I intend to share and teach mindfulness to fellow survivors in my TBI community. Despite ongoing frustrations with the cognitive deficits, recurring fogginess and loss of jobs, mindfulness practice just works in creating peace of mind. It returns me to a joy and clarity in being with what I love. I am happier and more satisfied throughout my life.

TBI has stricken millions. It has often been misdiagnosed and thus poorly treated. In top-of-the line and expensive rehabilitation programs I was taught 'compensatory coping strategies' for the 'cognitive deficits' of my brain injury. These strategies were well intended, but may fall short of addressing our need for inner well being. I had to learn that necessary inner transformation for myself. I learned to sift gold from the gravel of my life experiences and found meaning and a purpose for myself. This is not formal rehabilitation; rather it is resting back into the present moment where neuroplasticity and our bodies' innate healing systems can engage. Acceptance and making peace with this condition arises for me from doing the mindfulness practice.

### ***Perspectives on Self-Care***

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this Bulletin), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

I recommend a variety of meditation techniques for different types of TBI. The first foundation of mindfulness is the body. Here we bring awareness to sensations that actually inform us that we have a body - pulsations, contact with clothing, feeling our weight, that which you directly sense, non-conceptual. Seated, standing, walking or lying down are all useful postures for your body in meditation. With awareness of the body in this way we can then return our attention to the chosen primary object of attention. I usually use the breath as this object, after all it's everywhere I am and is always present to be observed. What I do is bring attention to breathing, changing it in no way. Watching the entire process: in and out and in and out, exactly as it is. We are developing a skill here, being present with the present moment, just as it is: patiently, attentively in a clear focus of attention. This is a starting point for our inner transformation, in being willing to have it be as it is.

Head-injury is an invisible disability, not easily seen from the outside like a wheelchair or crutches. However, it's still a disability known profoundly from inside, and of course to those close to us. It is very different for each person and family. We must each explore that which will work in your own situation. Gold Mind Meditation Project has the purpose and intended result of helping you transform your relationship with this persistent condition, not promising rehabilitation – choosing to do a practice intentionally that can have us be strong in the present moment, able to be with much that previously overwhelmed us. This is teaching a powerful skill of mind that can be learned with regular practice. It is with energy and joy I now work on actually teaching and using this extraordinary practice with survivor-lead brain injury support groups here in Portland, OR.

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Had Walmer, father and TBI survivor, lives in Lake Oswego, OR. He has a BS in Community Development from Oregon State University and is founder of [Gold Mind Meditation Project](http://www.goldmindmeditationproject.org) for TBI (GMMP), and The Barking Dog Library – http://www.portlandinsight.org/library_main.htm. He has been practicing Vipassana/Insight Meditation for 24 years.



Skillful Means

The [Skillful Means wiki](#), sponsored by the Wellspring Institute, is designed to be a comprehensive resource for people interested in personal growth, overcoming inner obstacles, being helpful to others, and expanding consciousness. It includes instructions in everything from common psychological tools for dealing with negative self talk, to physical exercises for opening the body and clearing the mind, to meditation techniques for clarifying inner experience and connecting to deeper aspects of awareness, and much more. The following psychological practices help one simulate the parts of the brain that create positive feelings and help reduce stress.

Full Body Awareness

Purpose/Effects

Body awareness exercises help to relieve stress by allowing us to become more mindful of how our body reacts to external stimuli. It can be a meditative practice that strengthens the link between the mind and the body, allowing you to better modulate the ebbs and flows of both, thus acting as a sort of informal biofeedback monitor.

Method

Summary

Become fully aware of the body's tensions and then release them through visualization.

Long Version

1. Lie down or sit in a relaxed posture and settle into a comfortable state. Breathe in fully and deeply. Slowly pass your mind over your body, sensing each part without thinking about it too much. Find areas of tension or pain that might "speak up" at this time.

2. Now, slowly, go through your body, thinking to yourself:

Does my head ache? Is there tension in my scalp, my skull, my brain, my face?

Is there tension in my jaw? Do I clench my mouth?

Are my neck and shoulders tight? Do they ache or feel wound-up?

Am I holding my breath, sighing heavily, clenching my fists?

Is my heart racing? Do I feel flushed?

Is there a knot in my stomach? Do I feel slightly ill or bloated?

Am I unable to sleep or relax? Am I constantly anxious and manic?

3. With these questions, you can find the places where your body holds tension. Consider these reactions. When do they come on--in situations of stress?

4. Now, once again pass your mind over your body, this time imagining a healing white light passing over you, perhaps focusing for longer periods on the parts that hold stress, pain, and tension. At this point, your limbs may begin to tingle, and you may even begin to hallucinate very slightly a calming, rocking sensation. Don't be afraid of these sensations! Your mind is working to relax your body.

5. With deep, full breaths, visualize pulling this white light into your chest or belly in a slow, healing fashion. Imagine its radiant energy flowing through your body from your core to all your extremities, healing areas of tension and pain.

6. Now, with five slow, easy breaths, count yourself back into the "real world." Be sure to get up slowly to avoid fainting.

History

Body-based meditation techniques have a long history. Full body awareness exercise integrates this classical posture meditation with visualization and relaxation skills for a complete body-based stress relief technique.

Cautions

Please don't do this practice if tuning into your body feels uncomfortable or alarming, as it can for people, particularly if they have a history of painful or traumatic experiences.

Notes

Full body awareness also works well added to self-hypnosis techniques (which follow). While relaxing the body, you can insert the visualization portion of the full body awareness exercise in with the healing white light portion of self-hypnosis exercise.



Self-hypnosis, autohypnosis

Purpose/Effects

Self-hypnosis is an important branch of modern hypnotherapy, used either in addition to guided hypnosis. It can be done using a CD or tape recording that leads you into a trance state, or through a learned routine, such as the one below. Self-hypnosis can be an effective therapy for pain relief, gastrointestinal upset (especially in the case of irritable bowel syndrome), a tool to assist in weight loss and addiction recovery, and to relax, relieve stress and anxiety, and to promote general wellbeing. By leading the conscious mind into a relaxed, unfocused awareness, it becomes susceptible to positive autosuggestion.

Method

Summary

Sink into a state of complete relaxation and trance, state the necessary affirmations, and re-emerge.

Long Version

1. Find a quiet place where you can turn ringers off of phones and otherwise ensure silence for at least half an hour. Sit or lie down comfortably; many people enjoy using a recliner for self-hypnosis sessions. Ease into a restful position, with arms and legs lying heavily and loosely. Don't cross your legs as they may start to fall asleep and leave you uncomfortable.

2. Close your eyes and begin to breathe deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth. Slowly relax your body by visualizing the tension and stress flowing out of your muscles, starting at your toes and moving up your legs, through your torso and arms, and finally your head. Let your heavy limbs become lighter with this visualization.

3. In a similar way, let the mental sensations of fear, stress, and anxiety flow out of your mind. If they arise, instead of trying to force them out, just observe them and let them slowly pass away. Visualize with each breath these negative feelings leaving with each exhalation and a bright white light coming in with each inhalation, bringing with it positive feeling and a healing energy.

4. Now, visualize that you are at the top of a flight on ten stairs. Visualize yourself descending this staircase slowly, counting down to yourself with each one, from ten to one. When you reach one, you will be at a doorway. Visualize opening this door to a calm paradise, full of beauty and serenity. Allow yourself to relax and enjoy the natural beauty of your personal haven, breathing in its purifying air deeply. While you are here, you may decide to make some affirmations. Visualize yourself walking through your serene place until you come to a body of water. Look down into this body of water and see your reflection looking back at you. With relaxed and loving resolve, repeat between one and three affirmations silently to yourself two or three times each.

5. When you have made your affirmations and explored your paradise as fully as you wish, return to the doorway. Visualize yourself opening the door and ascending the staircase slowly and relaxedly, counting up silently from one to ten. When you have reached the top, take three easy breaths and let them bring you back to the outside world. Rest silently with your eyes closed for a little longer, then allow them to open and take in the world from your newly relaxed and refreshed state.

6. As you do this exercise more, your trance will deepen and improve.

History

The 18th-century German physician Franz Mesmer developed a primitive form of hypnosis based on what he called “animal magnetism”; later, the Portuguese monk Abbé Faria postulated that hypnosis-type effects were due to the power of suggestion instead. In 1841 the Scottish physician James Braid took these ideas and developed both traditional guided hypnotism and self-hypnotism. Later, psychologists like Émile Coué refined autosuggestion techniques. In the 20th century, research confirmed that self-hypnosis had similar effects to “hetero-hypnosis” and proved its worth as a self-help technique.

Notes

If you find hypnotic and autosuggestive techniques helpful, there are a great many different possibilities, such as [Affirmations](#), [Autogenic Training](#) and [Guided Hypnosis](#). You may want to use self-hypnosis as a supplement to hypnosis sessions guided by a therapist. This is a very effective way to maximize therapeutic benefit while saving time and money.



Fare Well

May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.