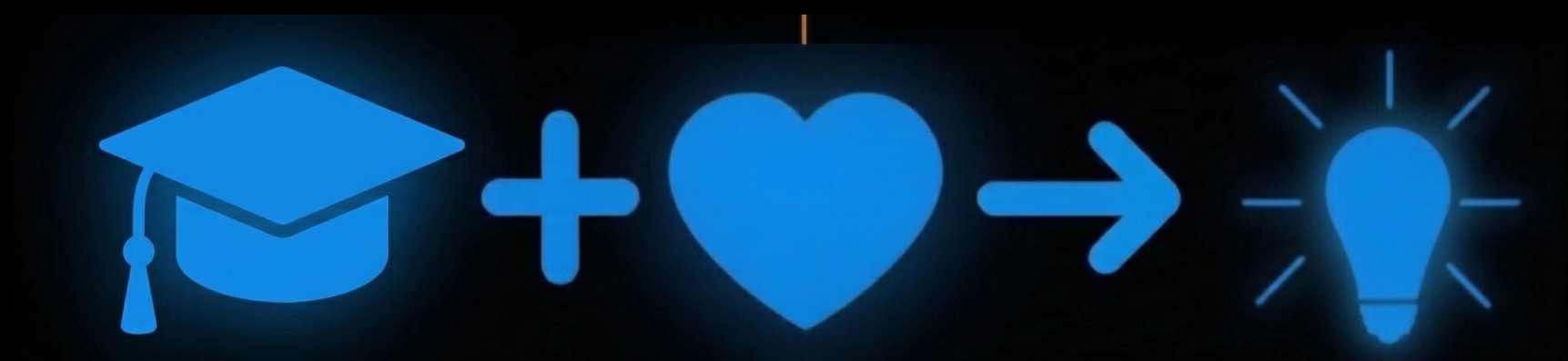
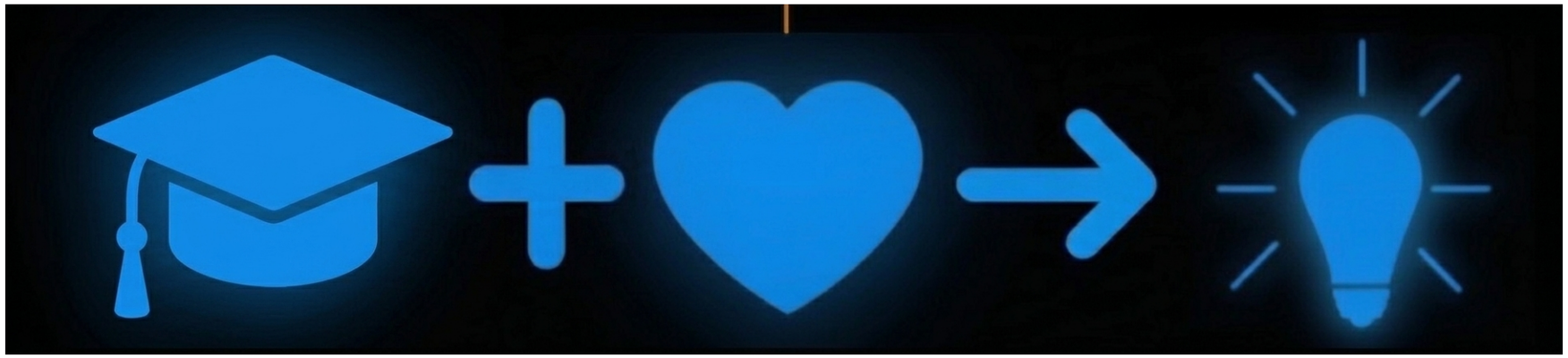
Mindfulness in Education Toolkit



Practical Stress Management Tools for Educators

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022



It is no secret that teaching, leading, and learning in today's fast-paced educational environments can feel overwhelming. Students often struggle to feel seen, and administrative demands can crowd out the important human connections that lie at the heart of learning. Yet, this challenging landscape also offers a powerful truth: in order to truly inspire and support our students, we as educators must also learn to care for and sustain ourselves. We must practice self-care with diligence.

As a clinician, health educator, and certified mindfulness meditation teacher, I created this toolkit based on years of seeking practical techniques that can be applied in fast-paced learning environments. Blending neurophysiology and behavioral science with ancient wisdom, these quick, in-the-moment practices can help build emotional resilience, foster collaboration, and restore a deeper sense of professional purpose in guiding others.
This toolkit has been utilized at institutions worldwide, and I offer it freely with deep gratitude and best wishes to everyone dedicated to learning. Inside, you will find simple yet profound physical, mental, and contemplative practices designed to fit right into a busy school day. These techniques belong to everyone, and I invite you to try them and discover which work best for you. By finding your own path to peace and renewal, it is my hope that you will pass it on to your students, colleagues, and community. May it ripple outward.

Warmly,
Lee Lipton, PA-C
University of the Pacific

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

"Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, in the service of wisdom and compassion."

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Table of contents

Physical Strategies: Page 5

Cognitive Strategies: Page 9

Meditative Strategies: Page 13

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Physical Strategies

Breathing Techniques
Body Scan
Somatic Anchoring

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Breathing Techniques

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

Gentle breath regulation techniques can help slow down your body's physical reactions to stress.

For centuries, cultures worldwide have used breathing techniques to calm the mind and reverse stress. You can use these exercises anytime, even during difficult moments. Make sure to breathe at a pace and depth that feels natural and comfortable for you. Breath work may be performed while sitting, standing, or even lying down. Eyes may be closed or open.

Box Breathing:

This technique builds focus, lowers stress, and restores calm. To start, picture a perfect square in your mind. Each count of 4 represents one side of the square.

Inhale for a slow count of four. You can breathe through your nose or mouth.
Hold the breath for a count of four.
Exhale for a count of four.
Pause for a count of four. Wait for the next breath to arise, and begin again.

Bamboo Breathing:

This method releases physical tension, settles anxiety, and promotes deep relaxation. To start, visualize a bamboo stalk with horizontal lines. You will pause briefly at each line as you breathe out.

Inhale a deep breath
Exhale a little bit of air, then hold your breath for 1-2 seconds.
Step Down by exhaling a little bit more air and hold again for 1-2 seconds.
Repeat pausing 3-4 more times until you empty your lungs comfortably.
Reset as you wait for the next breath to arise, and repeat.

Body Scan

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

A body scan can bring your awareness to any unnecessary physical tension so you can release it.

This calming practice is a quick and effective tool to help you find calm and stay grounded. You may keep your eyes open and lower your gaze softly, or close your eyes if that is appropriate. This can be done anytime, anywhere.

Body Scan:

Support: Start by feeling the weight of your body against your support. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Let yourself settle into the natural rhythm of your breathing.

Torso: Bring your awareness to your torso. Soften any tension or tightness you find there. Let your abdomen relax completely to receive each breath.

Legs: Feel your legs supporting you or being held up. Notice if they feel heavy, light, or pulsing. You might slowly shift your weight from side to side.

Feet: Shift your attention to your feet. Notice sensations like pressure, vibration, or warmth. Gently wiggle your toes.

Upper body: Relax your shoulders and release tightness in your neck and throat. You might move your arms and shoulders slightly. Take another full breath.

Hands: Take a breath and notice your hands. Let go of any clenching or tightness. Scan your arms and notice how they feel. Breathe in and exhale fully.

Face: Soften the muscles in your jaw, your forehead, and all around your eyes.

Connect: Now, try to feel your entire body all at once. Take a few more full, easy breaths. When you are ready, bring your awareness back to your surroundings.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Somatic

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

If time is tight, you can choose to focus on specific parts of your body, such as your hands or feet to ease anxiety and stress.

Somatic anchors are small, specific physical focal points in your body. When you are too busy or stressed to complete a full body scan, these anchors can quickly focus an overwhelmed mind. Using a somatic anchor helps regulate your nervous system and brings instant relief during moments of high stress or overstimulation. They can be practiced seated, standing or even moving, with eyes open or closed.

Lower Body Anchor:

Feel: Notice your socks, your shoes, or the weight of your feet on the ground.

Appreciate: Remember your feet have literally walked with you your entire life.

Shift: Move your weight slowly from right to left; feel the steady ground beneath you.

Ground: Push your feet into the floor one at a time to feel its solid support.

Breathe: Soften your abdomen and take 2 or 3 slow, deep breaths.

Reset: If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the solid ground.

Upper Body Anchor:

Feel: Notice the temperature, weight, tightness, or tingling in your hands.

Reset: Gently move you attention back to your hands when your thoughts drift.

Appreciate: Think about all the objects and people your hands have touched in your lifetime; think about all the things your hands have done since you were born.

Move: Slowly open and close your hands, then stretch and wiggle each finger.

Connect: Press your palms together gently and feel the comfort of the gesture.

Breathe: Move your attention to your breathing and let your body settle.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Cognitive Strategies

W³

Beginner's Mind

Reframing

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

What Went Well (W^3)

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

What Went Well (W^3) is a short practice that can help us let go of our negativity bias.

Our brains are naturally wired to fixate on the negative, but you can selectively reverse this pattern using a clinically validated practice called What Went Well (W^3). This cognitive reframing tool can build lasting optimism, gratitude, and joy. You can use it anywhere—at bedtime, after a long day, or right after a stressful meeting. W^3 does not pretend that hard times do not exist and does not negate difficulty; instead, it trains you to naturally spot the good often hidden within tough circumstances.

What Went Well (W^3):

Stop: Take a quick pause at the end of an event or day to review your interactions.

Find: Focus in on three things that went right. Can't think of much? Zero in on tiny details that sparked a bit of peace, amusement, or relief. Still can't think of anything? Try looking for things that managed *not* to go wrong.

Savor: Give each item 15 to 20 seconds of your time. Think about exactly why that moment, encounter or situation brought you comfort or happiness. Elaborate with as much detail as you can.

To get the most out of W^3, write your entries down or talk about them with a friend, coworker, or patient. Engaging your voice and pen uses more brainpower, locking those positive moments into your memory bank.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Beginner’s Mind

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

Deliberately paying attention to every detail of a routine task as if it was the first time is called "Beginner's Mind”— a powerful tool for staying present and attentive.

Cultivating a Beginner’s Mind is the practice of approaching a task, relationship, or situation as if experiencing it for the very first time. Beginner’s Mind can act as a calming anchor for your attention, improve your focus, and help you find ways to approach difficult interactions or activities with a fresh perspective.

Beginner’s Mind:

Reset: Take a full, deep breath and exhale, releasing any obvious tension in the body.

Pretend it's new: Approach a familiar patient, task, or situation as if you have never encountered it before.

Narrate: Try silently describing the details of your actions or the current interaction as if you were teaching it to a beginner.

Embrace the present: Contemplate the truth that this exact moment is entirely unique.

See clearly: Recall that every second is a genuine opportunity for a fresh start.

A Beginner’s mindset helps break us out of autopilot and sparks fresh perspectives. Approaching patient care with a sense of open-mindedness and curiosity significantly enhances the quality of care and level of satisfaction for both you and your students.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Reframing

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

Changing how you interpret a stressful situation helps you regain control over your energy and emotions.

Our minds constantly stream fast, unquestioned thoughts that directly shape our feelings and actions, but endless mental commentary makes life harder than it has to be. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) uses a reframing technique called Socratic Questioning to help us pause and evaluate these automatic, often stressful beliefs.

By asking ourselves a series of open-ended questions, we can dismantle harmful, conditioned thinking habits and find healthier perspective.

Socratic Questioning:

What is the thought? Pinpoint the specific unhelpful thought.

Fact or Feeling? Are there facts to support your conclusions, or is an emotion driving the thought?

True? Weigh the evidence. Is what you think true? Can you absolutely know it is true?

Nuance: Look for gray areas instead of all-or-nothing thinking.

Alternatives: Imagine other possible explanations for the situation.

Habit? Has repetitive thinking caused you to believe your view is the only possible answer?

Limited Time? Try this shortened version:

Ask: What am I telling myself about this situation right now?

Check: Is there any other possible way to view this situation?

Shift: If my best friend was in this situation and feeling this way, what would I tell them?

Reframe: What is the most helpful way to view this situation?

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Meditative Strategies

Just Like Me
Mission Statement
Does It Matter?
Maitri

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Just Like Me

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

Looking at somebody is not the same as really seeing them.
Acknowledging our similarities helps us access true compassion.

Even while helping others, it is easy to become detached, shut down, or frustrated. This "Just Like Me" meditation helps restore your innate compassion by highlighting the humanity we all share. It is a gentle way to help us recall that our similarities are bigger than any of our differences.

Just Like Me:

Use this exercise anytime—before stepping into a patient's room, during a team huddle, or when interacting with someone who tests your patience.
Try using a few of these statements, or you can also make up your own:

This person has feelings, thoughts, and emotions, just like me.
This person has experienced good days and bad days, just like me.
This person has had struggles and hardships, just like me.
This person has worries and fears, just like me.
This person was once a small child, just like me.
This person is trying their best, just like me.
This person wants to be kind and caring, just like me.
This person has a lifetime of unique experiences, just like me.
This person hopes to be happy, just like me.
This person wants to know they matter, just like me.
This person wishes to be safe, strong, and healthy, just like me.

If you can, allow some wishes for well-being to arise.

You may want to silently close with some of these phrases below.

I recognize you are a human being, just like me.
I see we are more alike than different.
I notice a part of myself in you.
I know we share many of the same needs and wants.
May we both be granted dignity, grace, and respect.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Mission Statement / Does It Matter?

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

Connecting with what really matters can give you a sense of purpose and guidance, helping to build your resilience.

Personal Mission Statement:

A personal mission statement is like an internal compass- a short statement that affirms your aspirations and core values.
It defines what you stand for, what matters to you and how you aspire to live.
Taking time to clearly define your larger purpose will serve as a mental anchor, keeping you resilient despite unexpected changes, setbacks, and challenges.

Here are some questions to consider as you write yours:

Core priorities: What matters most to you in your life?
Guiding principles: What phrases inspire you and guide your daily choices and interactions?
Identity: What do firmly you stand for?
Legacy: What qualities or contributions would make you feel your life was well-lived?
Passion: What brings you the deepest joy and fulfillment?
Aspiration: If there were no barriers, what is your greatest aspiration?

Does It Matter?

A very simple and profound mindfulness practice you can use at any moment in time is to make use of three incredibly short words comprising one powerful question: “Does it matter?”

This grounding question can align you with your core values and mission. It reminds you that every word, thought, and action shapes who you aspire to be—both as a person and a healthcare professional. Asking this helps you regain inner peace and ensures you show up intentionally in the present moment.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Maitri

Time: 30 seconds-5 minutes

Maitri means kindness, benevolence, or unconditional friendliness toward oneself and others.

Maitri (MY-tree) is the ancient practice of being a true friend to yourself and others. It forms the foundation of deep compassion, which is vital for meaningful and effective patient care. It might feel a bit strange at first to wish yourself well, but stick with it—the benefits are worth the initial awkwardness.

Maitri Practice: Self-compassion
Silently and sincerely repeat these phrases to yourself. Gently redirect your focus if your mind wanders:

- May I be happy
- May I be peaceful
- May I be safe
- May I be well
- Repeat this as many times as you'd like, taking deep and relaxed breaths.

Maitri Practice: Compassion for patients
Visualize a specific patient—or practice this directly in their presence. Take deep, relaxed breaths and mentally extend these wishes to them:

- May you be happy
- May you be peaceful
- May you be safe
- May you be well
- Repeat this as many times as you'd like, taking deep and relaxed breaths.

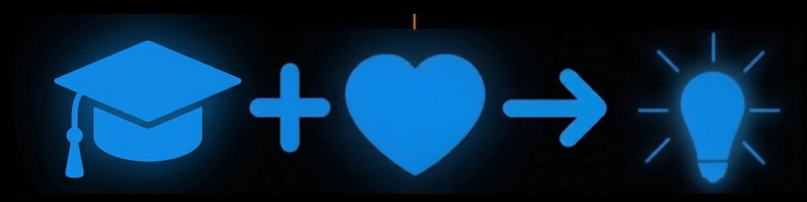
Maitri Practice: Collective compassion
This practice can expand to any level. Imagine yourself, your patient, all the patients in the clinic or hospital, your team of colleagues, and other providers around the world.

- May we all be happy
- Maybe all be peaceful
- May we all be safe
- May we all be well
- Repeat this as many times as you'd like, taking deep and relaxed breaths.

Take a moment to feel the shared human need for ease, safety, and freedom from distress.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Reflection:



What is one impactful takeaway from this book?

Which of these skills resonated for you?

How will you fit these practices
into your daily routine?

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Suggested Reading:

Brach, T. (2003). *Radical acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a Buddha*. Bantam Books.

Chödrön, P. (2016). *When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times* (20th anniversary ed.). Shambhala Publications.

Gunaratana, H. (2011). *Mindfulness in plain English* (20th anniversary ed.). Wisdom Publications.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness* (Rev. ed.). Bantam Books.

Kornfield, J. (2008). *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. Bantam Books.

Nhat Hanh, T. (1991). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*. Bantam Books.

Nhat Hanh, T. (1999). *The miracle of mindfulness: An introduction to the practice of meditation* (M. Ho, Trans.). Beacon Press.

Salzberg, S. (2020). *Lovingkindness: The revolutionary art of happiness* (Shambhala Classics ed.). Shambhala Publications.

Williams, J. M. G., Teasdale, J. D., Segal, Z. V., & Kabat-Zinn, J. (2007). *The mindful way through depression: Freeing yourself from chronic unhappiness*. Guilford Press.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

References:

Banerjee, M., Cavanagh, K., & Strauss, C. (2017). A Qualitative Study with Healthcare Staff Exploring the Facilitators and Barriers to Engaging in a Self-Help Mindfulness-Based Intervention. *Mindfulness, 8*(6), 1653–1664.

Botha, E., Gwin, T., & Purpora, C. (2015). The effectiveness of mindfulness based programs in reducing stress experienced by nurses in adult hospital settings: a systematic review of quantitative evidence protocol. *JBI database of systematic reviews and implementation reports, 13*(10), 21–29.

Brach, T. (2003). Radical acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a Buddha. Bantam Books.

Chmielewski, J., Łoś, K., & Łuczyński, W. (2021). Mindfulness in healthcare professionals and medical education. *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health*, *34*(1), 1–14.

Chung, A. S., Felber, R., Han, E., Mathew, T., Rebillot, K., & Likourezos, A. (2018). A Targeted Mindfulness Curriculum for Medical Students During Their Emergency Medicine Clerkship Experience. *The western journal of emergency medicine, 19*(4), 762–766.

Crane, R. S., Brewer, J., Feldman, C., Kabat-Zinn, J., Santorelli, S., Williams, J. M., & Kuyken, W. (2017). What defines mindfulness-based programs? The warp and the weft. *Psychological medicine, 47*(6), 990–999.

Dobkin P.L. Hutchinson T.A. (2013). Teaching mindfulness in medical school: where are we now and where are we going?.*Med Educ. 47*: 768-779.

Fairhurst K, May C. Knowing patients and knowledge about patients: evidence of modes of reasoning in the consultation? *Fam Prac*. 2001;18(5):501–505.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Bantam Books.

Klimecki, O., & Singer, T. (2012). *Empathic distress fatigue rather than compassion fatigue? Integrating findings from empathy research in psychology and social neuroscience*. In B. Oakley, A. Knafo, G. Madhavan, & D. S. Wilson (Eds.), *Pathological altruism* (pp. 368–383). Oxford University Press.

Kornfield, J. (2008). *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology*. Bantam Books

Kriakous, S.A., Elliott, K.A., Lamers, C. et al. The Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on the Psychological Functioning of Healthcare Professionals: a Systematic Review. *Mindfulness 12*, 1–28 (2021).

Lai, Siew Tim. (2017). 'The Three Good Things' – The effects of gratitude practice on wellbeing: A randomised controlled trial. *Health Psychology Update. 26*. 10.

Luchterhand, C., Rakel, D., Haq, C., Grant, L., Byars-Winston, A., Tyska, S., & Engles, K. (2015). Creating a Culture of Mindfulness in Medicine. *WMJ, 114*(3), 105–109.

Mathews, G., & Anderson, C. (2021). The Lived Experience of Learning Mindfulness as Perceived by People Living With Long-Term Conditions: A Community-Based, Longitudinal, Phenomenological Study. *Qualitative health research, 31*(7), 1209–1221.

McCray LW, Cronholm PF, Bogner HR, Gallo JJ, Neill RA. Resident physician burnout: Is there hope? *Fam Med. 2008;40*:626–632.

McKenzie, S. P., Hassed, C. S., & Gear, J. L. (2012). Medical and psychology students' knowledge of and attitudes towards mindfulness as a clinical intervention. *Explore, 8*(6), 360–367.
Rippstein-Leuenberger K, Mauthner O, Bryan Sexton J, et al A qualitative analysis of the Three Good Things intervention in healthcare workers BMJ Open 2017;7:e015826.

Sexton JB, Adair KC. Forty-five good things: a prospective pilot study of the Three Good Things well-being intervention in the USA for healthcare worker emotional exhaustion, depression, work–life balance and happiness *BMJ Open* 2019;9:e022695.

Younie L. *Beginner's Mind*. London J Prim Care (Abingdon). 2017 Sep 8;9(6):83-85.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022

Suggested Reading:

Lee Lipton is a certified physician associate with experience in urgent care, family medicine and women's health. She works as a clinical instructor at University of the Pacific, providing teaching and mentorship to the school's physician associate students.

An international presenter and health educator, Lee also creates and facilitates education sessions for international corporate and medical groups on topics such as resilience, mental health, mindfulness, and meditation.

Her professional interests include preventive care and behavior change, as well as the effect of mindfulness practices on disease outcomes and healthcare provider burnout.

She has published articles in the Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants and the Journal of Professional Nursing.

© Lee Lipton, PA-C 2022