

The Daily Practice

*Learn Techniques to Help Heal Brain Dysregulation and
Other Symptoms of Childhood PTSD*

This handout is meant to be downloaded as an accompaniment to the three videos in the course.

Video 1: My Story and How I Learned the Daily Practice

Video 2: How to Write Fears and Resentments
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Video 3: After Writing, Rest Your Mind With Meditation
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Try Daily Writing to Re-Regulate Your Brain

The root of many Childhood PTSD symptoms is brain dysregulation. We all get dysregulated sometimes, and we all eventually re-regulate. But if we spend a lot of time stuck in a dysregulated state, it becomes almost impossible to pay attention, connect with people, and make positive changes in our lives. There are several ways to re-regulate, but getting fears and resentments OUT of your head and ONTO paper is the first thing I teach my students. This kind of writing is free, it works quickly, and you can do it absolutely anywhere. Try it and see if it helps you unpack the tangle of thoughts, triggers and emotions that can lead to dysregulation.

HERE'S THE FORMAT:

- Begin by writing "I have fear..." and list whatever may come to your mind, in whatever order it comes. There's no need to dig into the past. Just write down what's already there right now.
- If you notice you are angry, write "I am resentful at..." and name the person, group or institution. It could be your friend, God, the IRS, or yourself, for example.
- Immediately after you name this person, and before you say why you're resentful at them, write "because I have fear..." and then write why. We say this because we can usually not be certain we are right about the seeming cause of resentment, and anyway, it's the fear that rises up about the problem that's actually making us ineffective and unreasonable.
- You'll often find there are many fears clumped up under resentment, so poke around lightly and see if there is more. Your fears and resentments don't need to be significant or even true. You don't need to know or analyze why they are in your mind. You just need to write them down, so your mind can have more space.

I have fear I didn't get enough sleep. Fear lack of sleep makes my ADHD worse. Fear I'm always tired. Fear therefore I don't exercise. Fear now I look awful in my good jeans. Fear I won't get to sleep on time tonight.

I'm resentful at L. because I have fear he snores and keeps me awake. Fear he won't do anything about the snoring because (fear) he doesn't care about me. Fear I'm always with people who don't care about me. Fear I always feel I have to hide my anger or L. will freak out and leave. Fear if he leaves I can't afford this place. Fear it's a matter of time before he leaves and (fear) I should leave him first.

I am now ready and hereby release these fears and resentments. I seek now a clear vision of what I am to do today, and the energy, focus and inner calm I need to do it well!

Jane

*(example of alternate ending, for those who pray)
I am now ready and humbly ask that you, God, remove these fears and resentments. I pray to know your will for me today, and to have the strength to carry it out*

Jane

HELPFUL TIPS:

- Write first thing in the morning, and again in the evening. You can write even more than that if you like, but make sure you write at least twice a day.
- Write as much as needed to feel better (at least a little better than when you started).
- Think of fears and resentments as wet leaves stuck on your windshield. One by one, you are picking them up and flinging them off. You're not studying them or dwelling on them. Once they're off the windshield, light comes in and you can see again, simple as that. There's no need to write well or look for insight. It's not a journal.
- Don't worry that releasing fears and resentments will leave you helpless or unable to act on problems. Trust that the release of troubling thoughts will only make you clearer and more effective.
- Be careful not to leave your writing where other people will see it, and get their feelings hurt. Shred it, burn it or write illegibly.
- When you're done writing, use one of the endings shown in the sample above, or write your own. Use your imagination to see those thoughts released (or removed) from your mind. Don't hold onto them, and don't dig up your whole life in a day. Just write and be rid of whatever thoughts are disturbing and dysregulating you right now. With less dysregulation, you'll have more clarity and strength to do good with your day and your life.

After Writing, Rest Your Mind With Meditation

Twice a day, just after doing your writing, it's time to meditate! Meditation rests your mind after the work writing, helps to re-regulate, and opens the way for inspiration and inner guidance.

- The goal of this kind of meditation is rest for your mind. It's different from other kinds of meditation where the goal might be to be still, to focus on your breath, to contemplate something... This is super easy, and all you have to do is relax into it.
- First, choose a "mantra" -- a word you can focus on while you meditate. This should be a word that is meaningless to you in that it doesn't start you thinking or feeling anything in particular. We use it to get our focus off of other things. *Tip: If you want to borrow a simple mantra, try "release," "this," or "easy"*
- Find a comfortable place to sit, in a chair, on a sofa, in bed, in the car -- anywhere where you'll be undisturbed and safe while you close your eyes. Sit in a dignified way, and avoid letting the back of your head rest on anything. It's OK to put your feet up, or wrap yourself in a blanket, or otherwise make yourself comfortable.
- For 20 minutes, sit with your eyes closed and focus on your mantra, saying it slowly to yourself every few seconds (not out loud). Use a timer so that you'll know when 20 minutes have passed.
- If you can't sit for 20 minutes, do what you can. But you'll get best results with 20 minutes of meditation, twice a day.
- If you forget to focus on the mantra and begin thinking, no problem. Just gently return to the mantra as soon as you realize your mind was wandering.
- If you fall asleep during your meditation, that's OK. Again, just return to the mantra until your 20 minutes have elapsed.
- If there is noise around you, that's OK. It's good to learn how to meditate with distractions.
- If you're really struggling with thinking, consider spending more time on your writing before your next meditation. Writing helps make a little space in your mind for meditation.
- If meditation brings up fearful thoughts, it's OK to keep it short for a while.
- If you have a preferred form of meditation, it's fine if you prefer to do that. For many people, super-simple meditation ends up getting better results because it's easier to stay with it long-term.
- Twice a day is recommended because it works best to re-regulate your mind. But if you miss a meditation, don't worry about it!
- It can be nice to meditate with others, either in the same room, or (if you're meditation pals don't live near you) on a video conference call (no kidding! It feels like you're meditating together!)

Daily Practice FAQs

What if I don't have time to write and meditate twice a day?

Most people have this concern, and I did too. One of the reasons we often feel rushed is because our minds are full of thoughts, making it hard to focus, which then makes it hard to stick to a plan or get things done. So the surprise benefit of the Daily Practice is that it seems to give us MORE time. With a better ability to pay attention and less “spinning our wheels,” we find there is a lot more time in the day to use as we like. But you’ll have to try it to experience this.

I have a hard time meditating: Can I skip that part?

Yes! You can do this however you like. The reason I suggest meditation immediately after you write is because a) that’s what I was taught and b) 25 years of using this practice and teaching others has convinced me that this is a good idea. Writing is hard work for your spirit, whether it feels like it in the moment or not. People who don’t meditate tend to abandon the practice after a little while. A rest for your mind makes it much more successful and sustainable over time.

I have my own form of meditation (mindfulness, Vipassana, etc.): Can I just do that?

Yes, you can do whatever works for you. The reason I suggest this simple meditation is because it’s more restful than most other formal ways of meditating. There’s no need to focus on posture, breath, or emptying the mind. Effortlessness is the goal here (although even having a goal takes effort!). If you like this simple method (which is a very crude and simplified version of Transcendental Meditation or “Vedic” meditation) you may want to find a teacher and get trained.

I am Christian (or another religion) and would prefer a meditation that does not conflict with my faith.

No problem! You can use a holy name or passage from scripture as your “mantra.” If you find that this requires a lot of effort, you could always stick with the neutral mantras like “This” or “OK.”

What if writing about fears and resentments “brings them up” and makes them worse?

If you’re feeling worse when you write, it’s probably one of two things. A) You may be “digging” too much into the past or analyzing what you write, rather than just jotting down what is *already* on your mind; or B) You may be trying to DO too much by knowing what to write and how to release it. Consider just pouring your thoughts on paper and releasing them (or better yet, asking a power greater than yourself to remove them). In my experience it is more effective than trying to move the negative thoughts out, all by yourself.

DAILY PRACTICE FAQ's, Continued

Will I have to write and meditate for the rest of my life?

Nope. But if it's really working for you, you'll probably find that a regular practice works better than an occasional one. And keeping it going works better than dropping it. You can let your own experience be your guide.

I don't have resentment. Can I just write fears?

Ha! Everyone has resentments. Maybe it's at other drivers. Maybe it's at a political party. Maybe it's at yourself, in the form of shame or guilt. Maybe it's at the supermarket for putting out meat so close to its expiration date. Maybe it's at me for insisting that you have resentment. It isn't always a big thing – sometimes it's trivial. But everyone has resentment. Let it get onto the paper.

I'm worried that if I release my fears, I will just be allowing people to abuse me.

That was initially my worry. But if anything, I'm braver about standing up for myself. I used to worry about complaining because maybe it was "just me." The Daily Practice leaves me clearer about what's wrong and whose fault it is (if anyone's), and freer to speak up, say no, or take action.

I am writing a gratitude list at the end of my writing. Is that OK?

You can do whatever you like, but I don't recommend embellishing the process with any extra "to-do" items. The Daily Practice will work without embellishment. With less fear and resentment, you will be naturally more grateful. Consider just allowing the practice to do its work on you.

I think the Daily Practice would be helpful to my spouse/child/friend. How can I encourage that?

Absolutely anyone can do this, even small children (they'll need you to take dictation of their fears and resentments. They can also draw pictures). The best way to attract someone to this practice, is to do it yourself. If it's working for you, people will notice the change and ask you about it. I don't recommend pushing it on anyone.

Questions?

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