

Practical Ways to Soothe Yourself in Times of Trouble

6 Easy Practices
for Feeling Stronger
and More Settled

HOPE & POSSIBILITY

Leonie Stewart-Weeks

“ Hope is the thing with feathers ”
that perches in the soul and sings
the tune without the words and
never stops at all.

Emily Dickinson

About This e-book

I have dedicated myself to learning different ways to help people to a better life; a life with hope and possibility.

The 6 easy practices included in this e-book are some of my favourites. They are great examples of the types of things you can easily do for yourself when life gets a bit hard and complicated. They will help you soothe yourself and become stronger and more settled. You can do them regularly or when you need to and the research is now showing that doing these practices can increase our wellbeing.

A Quick Overview on How To Use These Handouts

An Aspiration.....4-5

If you start your day with an **aspiration** or intention of how you want to be for the day, my experience is, you can live and act from that place. For example if you start the day saying: "today, I will come from love" or "today I choose to be patient", you will be amazed at what benefits that brings to you and others you interact with. (This takes less than 30 seconds. Why not try it, maybe while you are brushing your hair in the morning)

Deep Breathing.....7-8

If you use **deep breathing** anytime you need to ground or settle yourself I think you will notice a difference.(3 to 5 breaths or breathing deeply for 1 minute or longer will ground you. Physically it settles us)

Smile Down Meditation.....10-11

If you want to connect to something larger than you, the "**smile down meditation**" is lovely and really does bring a smile and lightness into your whole being. (This can take as little as 10 minutes; perhaps you can get a friend or partner to speak the notes and then swap. You can also read over the notes and do it for yourself. Research is now showing doing a practice

like this for 12 to 20 minutes a day has a real impact on your health and sense of wellbeing)

Clearing a Space.....13-14

If you have lots of worries and feel overwhelmed and don't know where to start, "**clearing a space**" places all your worries outside of you at the right distance for you and enables you to create a space and decide what thing you want to focus on.(This is a great way to untangle issues when you feel overwhelmed and stuck. Again, it takes only about 10 minutes and someone else can use the notes for you and then you can swap. There is something wonderful about doing this with someone else)

Getting Bigger Than What is Bothering You.....16-18

If you do the simple method of "**getting bigger than what is bothering you**", I know you will be astonished at how the clever use of language helps you to settle yourself and get some sort of easing. (This method is wonderful and really helps you to be beside your issues and then "keep them company". This helps you realise you are bigger than your worries and you can come into relationship with the things you find in a gentle way and often there is an easing and more space)

Being Grateful.....20-21

At the end of the day, if you make it a habit to reflect on 3 things in your day you are "**grateful**" for I think you will be surprised at the impact that has on your wellbeing. (This takes less than a minute, you can do this at the dinner table or as you go to bed. Again sharing this is powerful, however, even reflecting on your own reminds us of our blessings and yes we can count them.)

Please use these practices when you need to or pass them on to friends and loved ones so more of us can have ways to feel better.

Deciding on an Aspiration for Your Day

What is my ASPIRATION?

Gently guide yourself in – breathing in and out. Maybe take a bigger breath and find a place on your inside. Then just pause.....

Be present here. Let some of the people in your life arise in your senses.

Let love, compassion, tensions, sadness, and anything else be there. Now sense how close or distant you want those feelings or people to be. Imagine them. Allow whatever is there and see if you can do it without judgement.

Stay with a close circle of family and friends (a handful) and notice what comes.

What would matter with each of the people you have chosen if you only had a short time together?

How do you want to be with this person. Do each person in turn. What do you want to know or trust.....(pause about 1 minute).

As you go through a few people you might notice a theme.

What does your heart long for?

How do you want to be with these people?

What is your aspiration in these relationships? Just pause again.....

When you are ready, just take your time to open your eyes and write down in one sentence what you want your aspiration to be.

Just sense and write down what you aspire to?

My heart's aspiration is:



It is helpful to re-do this at regular intervals for example once a week or 2 weeks or even once a month. Our brain loves it when we keep things fresh. So each time you do this – do it freshly. What is it that really matters to you?

Eg Today I am choosing love
I am coming from love today
I will be kind to others and myself today

Adapted from Tara Brach www.tarabrach.com

“ Your aspirations are your possibilities. ”

Samuel Johnston

Deep Breathing

Practise twice a day for two weeks. It takes 2 to 4 minutes per day.

Guiding Directions/suggestions that can be used:

- Get comfortable in your chair or on the floor with a straight spine
- Close or lower your eyes
- Breath in for 4 (all the way into your tummy) and then breath out for 6-8
- Feel your self expanding with the "in' breath (inhalation)
- Feel yourself soften with the "out" breath (exhalation)
- Perhaps place one hand on your tummy and one hand on your lower ribs (just below your chest)
- As you exhale, relax abdomen, lower ribs and chest
- Repeat slowly and smoothly for 5 to 10 breaths

Homework: Use this technique any time you feel a bit stressed or anxious

OR modify this practice and say "I am breathing in calm (on your 'in' breath) and I am breathing out stress (on your 'out' breath). Or as you breathe in say 'calm' and as you breathe out say 'peace'. Or maybe add, "I feel my feet on the ground or I feel connected to the earth".

Choose the one you like best.

Did you know we all have an evolutionary Fight, Flight and Freeze Response?

- It is an autonomic, primitive response for survival. We are born with it.
- WE FIGHT, FLIGHT (RUN AWAY) OR FREEZE
- It protects us from danger and threat
- It mobilises the body to respond quickly
- We get an increased heart rate and respiration
- We get increased cortisol release (stress hormone)

There is no automatic way to relax but we can learn ways including the use of breathing.

When we practice relaxation techniques or mindfulness or meditation, the benefits are:

- Heart rate decreases
- Respiration decreases
- Brainwave activity decreases
- Blood pressure decreases
- Production of adrenaline decreases
- Immune function increases

And we feel more relaxed and safe and settled.

And now the research is showing we change our brains in positive ways and are able to calm ourselves in troubled time and be less reactive.

“ Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom. ”

Victor Frankl

Smile Down

An easy meditation to gently bring you back into your body

These notes will guide you through the Smile Down Meditation

Ready....Arrive right now into your body.

Close your eyes (or lower them if your prefer and soften your gaze)

Sit up tall

Begin with a few big breaths – exaggerating the in breath and slow out breath and let go. 3 times. Allow breath to resume its natural rhythm. (pause 1 minute). If you notice yourself thinking thoughts say “thinking” and then come back to your breath and the meditation.

Let your senses be awake. Sensing the space around you.

Imagine a great big, vast, blue, sky, extending in all directions. Sense that sky, the great open sky filled with a smile and imagine that smile descending and spreading into your mind. And let that smile spread into eyes and brows and feel that sensation in your brow and around the eyes.

Sensing a slight smile at the mouth.

Allowing yourself to receive the sensation at the mouth area.

Your eyes are smiling and your mouth.

You might let that smile move to your throat. Let the whole throat relax. Eyes, mouth, throat smiling.

Perhaps now let the smile move to your heart. Let it spread, not to cover over, just to allow it to spread and now extending awareness up into your shoulders.

Let the smile spread into your arms and let awareness go to hands and feel the tingling the pulsing. Feel the life that is there.

So now you can feel the eyes, mouth, heart, shoulders, arms.

Now move to your belly and let this be received in a softening belly. You can feel your awareness deep in the torso. Down into your back and radiating out.

Now feel the energy in your legs and now your feet. You can feel your feet from the inside out. A Vibrating, a tingling.
Widening the attention so you can feel the whole body at once – a field of sensation. (pause)

Play in this open field of awareness. Receive the smile and allow everything to just be as it is filled with a smile (pause)

Just be in this aliveness.
The simple in and out flow. The aliveness. The smile.
The pure awareness that is just noticing what is happening.

Let yourself be at home.

Be open, let it fill you up.
When or if you notice a thought, just notice and come back to your breath and come back to this smile.(pause)

Ring a cymbal 3 times if you are doing this meditation for someone else or you can download the app 'insight timer' and set it to ring after 10 minutes and swap roles (Adapted from Tara Brach www.tarabrach.com)

“ And no , we don't know where it will lead we just know there is something much bigger than any of us here. ”

Steve Jobs

Clearing a Space

Guided exercise and suggestions

These are guiding suggestions. If at any time they don't work for you allow your body to be your guide and stay with whatever is present for you. Simply acknowledge whatever is present for you and allow it to be just as it is.

As we go along maybe you can allow your eyes to close so that you can pay better attention to your body. If you are not comfortable with closed eyes you might like to lower them.

Notice how your feet are making contact with the floor... Notice how your body is making contact with the chair... notice if it's even on both sides .. what sort of pattern would it leave on the chair?
Now notice your breathing, observe your breath going in and out of your body.

Become aware of your body from the inside. Allow your attention to rest inside your body... In that area which includes your throat, chest and lower abdomen.

In a friendly, gentle way you can ask yourself, "*Is there anything in the way of me feeling really good*" or maybe "*What wants my attention now*" and if you become aware of something .. notice how the whole thing feels in your body, say hello to it. See if there is a body sensation, word, a phrase, an image, gesture, a sound, or something else, that seems to describe the whole of it. Or you might like to just say it back silently to yourself.

Then *check and see what would be just the right distance between you and it* you might imagine setting the whole issue with the feeling aside... perhaps on the floor in front of you, or on the chair beside you, or maybe on

an island in the middle of big ocean. Using whatever image or metaphor feels right to you. Checking where it might like to go. And if you find you can't set it aside, that's ok too. Just be with it in any way that feels right for you.

Allow your awareness to come back into your body and sense *and just see how it feels inside without that issue, maybe there's just a little more space.* Or perhaps you could ask your body "How would I feel inside if I didn't have that whole issue?"

Stay for a moment with the feeling that results from having found some distance from that issue... And now in friendly, gentle way, once more ask yourself "*Is there anything in the way of me feeling really good*" and repeat as many times as you need to.

If you sense that nothing is standing in the way of your feeling all ok right now, then sense into whatever is there for you and spend some time becoming familiar with that.

Now bring your attention back into your body and sense *how it feels inside without those issues, maybe it's just a little clearer in there, maybe a little more space... perhaps lighter, warmer... Maybe there's just a little more comfort or ease. Just notice how it is for you – whatever is there for you perhaps you could just notice it ... and welcome it if that feels right.*

Maybe invite a word, an image, a movement, a body posture, a metaphor ... or something else, which seems to capture the whole of how it is for you right now. You might like to check if you want to set that aside ... or perhaps you'd like to invite this to stay with you ...

We have taken some time here today to identify and place aside some of the issues of our everyday life, a little like unpacking a suitcase when you come back from a holiday. Some of things that you set aside may need some attention a little later. If there is something like that for you maybe let it know that you'll come back to it Gently bring your attention back into this room (adapted from Jane Quayle www.creatingconnections.com.au and Gene Gendlin www.focusing.org)

“ There is a crack, a crack in everything.
That’s how the light gets in. ”

Leonard Cohen

Get Bigger Than What Is Bugging You

Next time something is bothering you, try these 5 steps

1

Instead of saying "I AM (eg anxious, nervous, worried, angry, frustrated, sad, upset etc) try this instead:

SOMETHING IN ME IS _____(eg anxious, nervous, worried, angry, frustrated, sad, upset)

When you do this you are still in contact with the feeling but now there is a BIGGER YOU – if you like there is an "IT" ("a something") and there is a "YOU".

Now you can turn towards it, to be compassionate to it.

Most people find when they do this they don't feel so defined by their emotions, they have some distance, and somehow there is a bit of a shift, a bit of give or relax or a breath. (Not that the problem or issue has gone away but somehow it feels a bit better.)

Once you have done Step 1 the next thing to do is:

2

SAY HELLO TO "IT". (Hello is not "I Love you". You don't have to like the feeling or be glad it is there, you are just saying "Hello" – acknowledging it)

So it sounds like this: "SOMETHING IN ME IS eg NERVOUS AND I AM SAYING HELLO". AND THEN, SAY HELLO!

Now notice the difference that makes. The gift of saying HELLO is that you meet "IT" as "IT" IS.....

(Rather than ignoring 'it' or trying to deny 'it' or shoving 'it' down or becoming overwhelmed by 'it').

You are meeting "IT" as "IT" IS and that gives "IT" space to change. You are allowing and acknowledging "IT"

3

The third powerful practice for GETTING BIGGER THAN WHAT IS BUGGING YOU is to PLACE A GENTLE HAND on the part of you that you can sense or feel. Trust your hand, it knows where to go. When you do that remind yourself to bring a friendly quality of keeping it company (a bit like keeping a child or animal company when they have hurt themselves – a kind "there, there")

So this is simple:

You become aware of an emotional reaction, which may not be a pleasant one, and you say:

"SOMETHING IN ME FEELS NERVOUS" AND YOU SAY "HELLO" TO 'IT' AND YOU LET A GENTLE HAND MOVE TO THE PLACE WHERE YOU ARE FEELING "IT" AND STAY THERE A FEW MOMENTS, AT LEAST, AND KEEP IT COMPANY.

When you do this you are accepting yourself and whatever comes. All feelings change, especially when they are accepted. Change will also come from our inner wisdom.

4

You could now also add: "I AM SENSING SOMETHING IN ME THAT IS EG NERVOUS AND I AM SAYING HELLO AND KEEPING "IT" COMPANY AND I AM PLACING A GENTLE HAND WHERE I FEEL "IT"

When you say, "I am sensing", you are identifying with your larger self. You are bigger than the "something" that is bothering you.

The final step is:

5

NO WONDER I feel this way. For example if you are feeling nervous before a big netball game or disappointed after a game, say "NO WONDER" – and remember anyone would be nervous before a big game. This is showing ourselves compassion and self-acceptance.

So next time you feel an emotional reaction try these steps

1. I am sensing Something in me that is _____(your feeling) and
2. Say "Hello" to "IT" and keeping "IT" company in a caring way
3. Place a gentle hand on the place you are feeling "IT"
4. And say "No wonder", and then just wait a moment or two

Now you can see what allowing, acknowledging and being with your "somethings" in a gentle way brings.

It is not always that easy, but it is truly that simple.

Adapted from the work of Ann Wesier Cornell www.focusingresources.com

“ Be Gentle to your Mind, Body and Soul. Pause. Listen. Hear. Be with. And discover more of who you are and what you are becoming. ”

Leonie Stewart-Weeks

Be Grateful

It makes you more content

Start with 3 things you did well today

1. _____

1. _____

1. _____

One thing you want to reflect on and what you would do differently next time

3 things you are grateful for:

1. _____

1. _____

1. _____

Look at the things you are grateful for now and visualize and get a sense of those things now.

Homework:

Do this exercise every day for the next week. It is a gentle reminder of the things you do well (large or small) and when you do this you release dopamine and you interrupt the negativity. This exercise also reminds you of the things in your life to be grateful for and absolutely does help you count your blessings and feel better about your life.

Adapted from the work of Mark Waldman www.MarkRobertWaldman.com

“ Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. ”

Melody Beattie

About The Author

Leonie Stewart-Weeks



I am Leonie Stewart-Weeks. I provide counselling, coaching and focusing sessions in Drummoyne, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. I am passionate about working with couples and also with adolescents.

You and I can sit together with safety and trust and create a safe harbour to help you to discover how your life, (or your life with your partner), can be better.

I also design and run programs for schools. These 'More than mindfulness' programs teach tips, techniques and skills including mindfulness and focusing. This gives students a toolbox full of practical methods that can help them soothe themselves and build resilience and compassion.

If you'd like to get further free tips and insights to help you, I post regularly to [my blog](#) and have a page dedicated to sharing [resources that may help you](#).

If you would like counselling, coaching, or to learn about focusing or mindfulness, in Sydney or via Skype, feel free to call me 0438 412 667 or email me leoniestewartweeks@gmail.com. I would love to help you.

“ Cultivate the habit of being grateful. ”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Credits

Tara Brach www.tarabrach.com

Ann Wesier Cornell www.focusingresources.com

Mark Waldman www.MarkRobertWaldman.com

Jane Quayle www.creatingconnections.com

Gene Gendlin www.focusing.org

Thank you to all of my wonderful inspirations and teachers! I am grateful and blessed.

And also a big thank you to Kat love of www.katlove.com who designed this e-book with creativity and love because just like YOU she is awesome!