



wellness

Given the current focus on mindfulness practice, now is a good time to try it.

- 1 Start by deliberately shifting your awareness to the present.
- 2 Intentionally bring your attention to your breathing.
- 3 Allow other thoughts to come and go without judgment and come back to focusing on breathing in and out.
- 4 Notice subtle body sensations, without labeling, and receive sensations as they rise and fall.
- 5 Watch what comes into your mind and discover the mental habits that produce a sense of wellbeing and those that produce a sense of suffering.
- 6 Return to the sound and sensation of breathing.

Take a moment to check in with yourself and notice if you're being mindful or if your mind is full.



ask the clinician

by Dana Foland, RN

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a practice that is gaining traction in addiction and mental health treatment. The research done to study its efficacy as additional treatment for depression, anxiety and thought disorders has yielded impressive results.

The science of neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to change and adapt, is what makes mindfulness practice such an amazing tool. Our brain sends and receives messages by creating neural pathways. Over time, after developing routines and habits, our brains learn to use the same paths over and over to be more efficient. This can be helpful while doing certain tasks or developing healthy habits. But when the brain is consumed by negative thoughts or unhealthy behaviors, such as those that come with depression, anxiety and addictions, these paths become prominent and the brain "learns" to automatically think, feel and react in challenging ways.

Engaging in a mindfulness practice exercises your brain, creates new neural pathways and even contributes to the growth of new brain cells! ■

Why We Need Mindfulness

by Sarah White, MSW, LCSW

When we analyze the lives of our ancestors, we notice how the brain has evolved, yet we can see ways in which we are the same. To survive then, people had to think about what lie ahead or reflect on what happened in the past. The flight or fight response is one reason our ancestors were able to survive. If an animal had injured them, learning from this experience allowed them to live longer and pass along their genes. While analyzing the past, worrying about the future, constant planning, and fight or flight responses were helpful for survival, they are not as necessary today.

Today, we still find these responses deeply engrained in our hard wiring, but they are not necessary all the time. As a culture, we are seeing more and more individuals experiencing compulsive thinking, analyzing, judging and plotting how to make things better, but struggling to put this mind use on hold when not needed. This can make it challenging to listen to another talk or to fall back asleep in the middle of the night.

Fortunately, with brain development we can engage in practices that enhance our ability to manage the mind. One of these practices is mindfulness. Rather than worrying about the future or ruminating over the past, we can use mindfulness to focus our attention on the moment. Mindfulness helps us embrace rather than resist the struggles life can bring. A common working definition of mindfulness is awareness of present experience with acceptance, being attentive to what you are doing in the moment, like experiencing sensations in your body. The key is to continually invite ourselves to be in the moment with this acceptance to help retrain our brains into this new way of thinking. ■

Mindfulness is awareness of present experience with acceptance, being attentive to what you are doing in the moment.

Comments

We welcome your comments about this issue of *The Bridge* and invite you to submit ideas for future stories.

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WESTBRIDGE.ORG

or call us at
800.889.7871

Editor: Pam Michaud

creative corner

We invite our readers to share their artwork, essays, photos and poems.

waterfall image: participant



Sharing our experiences of recovery

Women of WestBridge (WOW) is an online support group for women who are supporting WestBridge participants. The group creates a place of connection and support that focuses on self-care and the recovery journey. WOW meets every other week via video conference to help those who may feel isolated and overwhelmed learn from others who have learned to cope with similar struggles. All sign a statement of confidentiality.

Below, the co-leaders of the group share their experiences in defining recovery and offer insight into the healing process and benefits of joining the support group.

barb c.

Our family joined WestBridge in New Hampshire in 2009 and my son is still receiving some treatment. He completed his associate's degree and will graduate from the University of NH with an Electrical Engineering degree in May. His plan is to begin working and to attend graduate school. We are extremely proud of him and forever grateful to WestBridge for the assistance and support they have given him and our family.

Recovery for me has been realizing that I have the strength, resilience and love to stay present and accept whatever is occurring in my life. The Serenity Prayer sums it up best. Recovery has been the evolution of knowing that I have everything I need in me, including a Higher Power. I no longer seek external sources. Recovery has been a journey of self-awareness of my thinking and behaviors and change.

Most helpful in my recovery have been seeking and finding a spiritual life through Al-Anon and working the 12 Steps with a sponsor. I also joined a spiritual community and began studying A Course in Miracles, Reiki, Oneness and Buddhist principles.

Developing new friendships and support through our WestBridge group has been comforting and enriching. **No one understands better than those who have experienced and are experiencing similar challenges.**

Other families supporting someone through recovery should know that there is always hope, and that the universe is always working for us, even during the darkest times.

michele s.

Since starting at WestBridge in Florida in April 2016, our son currently participates in the ACT program. He has his own apartment and lives independently supported by mentors. He is attending college, going to meetings, incorporating physical activities and volunteering on an AA hotline.

I think of recovery as the healthy process of finding oneself or recreating oneself. For my recovery, my belief in God, conversations with my sister and discussions with my husband and the Women of WestBridge have all been instrumental. **Co-leading the WOW group connects me to other women who share very similar hopes, fears, struggles and triumphs.** It is a time for us to focus on ourselves, to focus on gratitude. I believe that we support each other in understanding the value of celebrating even small personal steps toward recovery. Though we are a diverse group, we are like sisters, confident in sharing our vulnerabilities.

I don't envision recovery as a finished product. Instead, it is fluid, the goal being to accept what occurs and find peace. For me, working to becoming a positive force not only for myself, but also for others, has great meaning.

What I'd like other family members supporting someone through recovery to know is that at some point you will accept that you are not in control. You may not wish to accept it, but that is the reality. Do all that you can to locate a place where your family member can get the support he requires, stay informed and become the leading advocate for your own journey to recovery.

terry d.

My son began treatment at WestBridge in Florida in January 2014, first in the residential program and then in ACT. In May 2017, he returned home and is now working full time as an accountant.

I define recovery as regaining the ability to manage your life. I am doing that by strengthening my spirit, living a more mindful existence, and practicing gratitude. The most helpful tool in my recovery is making gratitude a daily practice.

Being a co-leader of WOW has given me the chance to reach out to other women struggling with the same issues that I have. I would like to think that I have helped them as much as they have helped me.

One thing I want other family members supporting a loved one through recovery to know is to be patient with your loved one as well as with yourself.

"This group gives me a place where other women really 'get' what I've been through and what I'm currently facing."

lori l.

From February 2014 until June 2017, my son received treatment at WestBridge in Florida and has been in the ACT program in New Hampshire since then. Recovery is a journey toward health and wellness. While my son is on his journey of recovery with mental illness and addiction, I am on a journey of recovery for my physical, mental and spiritual health.

I have found my faith to be most helpful in my recovery journey. The support I have received from my Bible studies and my sisters in Christ has helped me tremendously. I have also found the NAMI family-to-family class very informative and helpful, and I receive ongoing support from Celebrate Recovery and the Women of WestBridge support group. **Working with other women who have experienced what I have experienced has given me tremendous support and hope.** I have enjoyed developing friendships with the other co-leaders and love meeting women who are new to this journey of recovery. It is very rewarding to see other women make progress on their own recovery journeys.

I would like others to know that recovery is a lifelong journey. We are at our best when we are patient with the process of recovery in our own lives and in the lives of those we love, and with those we meet on similar journeys. Recovery is hard work, but well worth it.

donna o.

Our son started at The Commons at WestBridge in New Hampshire in March 2016 and is now in the ACT program.

To me, recovery involves recognizing the situation. Choosing to change, utilizing support systems and resources, forgiving oneself, rebuilding self-image and relationships with family and others. Working to build a healthy, positive and meaningful life, accepting "failures" along the way and being determined to begin the process anew.

Most helpful in my recovery is recognizing that I am not alone in this journey, that other dedicated parents in similar situations are willing to share their means of coping and WestBridge team members are there to give guidance and encouragement. As I have gained confidence in the WestBridge system and gotten to know individual team members and see how they work with and for participants, I have reduced my need to control everything. I have a long way to go, but I am learning.

I have recently begun co-leading the support group and see it helping me think more deeply about what other mothers/sisters are experiencing and seek out ways to support them in their coping and healing, the way WOW leaders have supported me.

There is hope, peace and positivity through the coordinated efforts of and ongoing communication among participants, families and WestBridge team members.

maryann d.

After 11 years of illness, we found WestBridge in New Hampshire, which began our path to wellness. My son lived in The Commons for one year and now has lived in the community for 10 years and is dedicated to all his work and has grown into an amazing man of whom I am very proud.

Recovery is ongoing! The journey offers a serious gift: an opportunity to overcome pretense and realize the meaning of life, why we are here and what we are meant to do. This journey is one that our family has been able to travel on together. WestBridge has helped with this journey with their overall expertise, ongoing training and diligence regarding promising new methods. In addition, their commitment to Alcoholics Anonymous attendance is a true blessing. As a mother, I am eternally grateful every single day.

Most helpful on my journey is NAMI and being part of the Women of WestBridge group. They have helped me attend to my own trauma, as well as my own care and happiness. Each meeting with the WOW group is a new challenge to look within and reach out lovingly to other mothers who are on their way to recovery as well.

Trust, hope and love are essential and most important is patience, no matter what!