

Moving mindfully through the holiday season

The holiday season is around the corner! This time of year is frequently a welcome opportunity to reflect, celebrate, rest, and connect with family, friends, and co-workers; however, long to-do lists, frequent parties, and/or traveling may conspire to pull us off our centers. Here are a few tips for moving through the holiday season that are reflective of the intuitive, inward perspective that the shorter days of winter can inspire and which may help us reclaim a bit of grounded-ness and composure in the midst of a busy day.

1. *Break free of “automatic pilot” by savoring.* Frequently we may find ourselves stepping through routines out of habit; holding just enough awareness to keep us going. “To savor” means to relish and take delight in the moment; to use all of our senses to discover a fresh perspective. Take the same walk to work in the morning? Vary your pace, make a point to notice the branching pattern of a tree you’ve passed many times before, take an extra few seconds to take in the expressions in the faces of family or friends around the dinner table. Our minds routinely process thousands of little bits of information every day, but out of habit we may only focus on a few.
2. *Pause and breathe.* Slowing down isn’t necessarily about being lazy or “zoning out,” but may be an opportunity to assess how we are meeting our basic human needs. It’s common for us to hold tension in our shoulders, jaws, around the eyes, or other areas that experience repetitive stress. Taking a few, full, deep breaths while leaning back in the support of a chair or while standing supported fully by a wall can be surprisingly refreshing. Allowing the eyes to close and the mind to drift for a moment or two more can help us tune in or “wake up” to areas of tension in need of extra attention and care.
3. *Remember that addressing one task at a time may be more than good enough.* Researchers who study multi-tasking have found that we’re not as good at it as we think. In fact, it turns out that we’re pretty miserable at it. It’s a bit like attempting to get a car out of ditch with a group of eager helpers all pulling in different directions. We often don’t get the results we want and lack of focus creeps into our awareness. Allowing ourselves to become fully absorbed in a task that we truly value, without distractions, first thing in the morning, can set a nice tone for the rest of the day.
4. *Seek to re-discover a sense of gratitude.* It is an unfortunate fact that our minds appear to be more strongly wired to remember unpleasant experiences rather than pleasant

ones. This has served a useful purpose in that our minds may learn to avoid danger or other obstacles in the future. The good news is that it is also possible to increase our capacity to welcome and appreciate ordinary everyday gestures or gifts. Did a co-worker take the time to make a brew a fresh pot of coffee in the break room? Perhaps a stranger offered a smile in the hallway? Did a new piece of information emerge that contributed to a new line of thinking? Gratitude can help us rediscover the “hidden gems” that may actually be in plain sight all along.

Giving ourselves permission to slow down and reconnect with ourselves and others offers an antidote to chronic stress and busyness, especially during the holiday season. This year, consider some new ways you might set your own pace!

Campus resource: The Counseling Center

The Counseling Center has developed a series of self-help brochures on a variety of topics of interest. These brochures include general information as well as helpful tips on dealing with the issue addressed. Some brochures have also been translated into other languages.

The Counseling Center has also developed a referral brochure, *Helping Distressed and Distressing Students*, for faculty, staff, teaching assistants, and other campus professionals. All of these publications are free and available at the Counseling Center for University of Illinois students, staff, and faculty. http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/?page_id=7

The Counseling Center provides services to help students reach a balanced Illinois experience, ranging from various counseling services, educational programming initiatives, training programs, outreach and consultation services, to a wide variety of self-help materials. Staff members at the Counseling Center have extensive training and experience working with college students. In addition, staff members reflect much of the diversity that is found on campus and are committed to meeting the specific needs of individuals from a variety of backgrounds whenever possible.

The Counseling Center is located at 610 E John St, Champaign, and can be reached at 217 333 3704.