



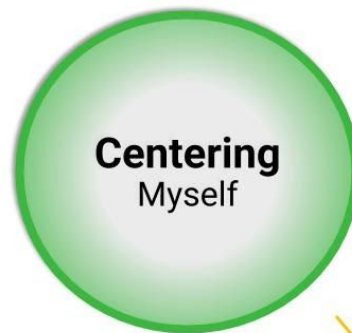
## Practical Skills for Centering

**Centering** is a “gateway resilience skill” because when we are centered, we can connect and collaborate with others more easily. Centering helps ground our body and guides wellbeing. The practice of centering restores our inner balance through focusing on the present. Awareness of the present places our attention in the here and now, which reduces negative thoughts that are the roots of anxiety and stress. A common cross cultural centering practice is intentional focus on the breath. Many faith and wisdom traditions as well as athletics, dance, martial arts, singing, theater, public speaking and other high performance pursuits use centering practices.

**How do we center?** The skills to help us center include the skills of noticing and listening to our internal cues, breathing mindfully, accepting what is true and letting go of what we cannot control, finding gratitude, being kind to ourselves, and finding a positive way forward.

### Centering: skills for personal balance

- **Noticing Myself**
- **Breathing Mindfully**
- **Letting Go**
- **Finding Gratitude**
- **Nurturing Myself**
- **Positive Reframing**



These skills help us develop self-awareness, self-regulation, self-empathy, self-forgiveness and self-trust. Now, let us take a deeper look at these six skills, including how they work, how people use them in daily life, how you can develop them through activities, and practices you can use to strengthen them.





## Noticing Myself

**Moment of Inquiry:** Stop and ask yourself, what am I noticing/sensing/feeling?

This resilience skill involves pausing and noticing, paying attention to the intelligence of our senses, emotions, and our intuition. Noticing Myself involves asking ourselves some questions: What are we aware of that is happening in and around us? What emotions are we feeling? When we feel ourselves getting angry or upset, the first thing we can do is ask ourselves, “What is happening in my body and around me?” so we can respond skillfully.

An important part of Noticing Myself is being able to recognize, name, and feel our emotions. We can have a whole set of different emotions in rapid order or even at the same time.



Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

When we recognize our emotions, we can learn what they have to tell us. Negative emotions are simply signals from our body that something needs to change. For instance, an important value of ours might have been crossed, creating a felt sense of anger. Maybe we are avoiding something that we need to pay attention to.

*If we listen to our bodies, even difficult emotions hold the key to extremely important information:*

**Anger** is a signal that an important value has been violated.

**Regret** lets you know you have done something which you don't want to repeat.

**Frustration** signals you need to change what you are doing if you want a different outcome.



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**Anxiety** lets you know you need to extra preparation or focus to cope with or to avoid possible negative consequences of an upcoming situation.

**Hopelessness** signals you need to let go of the way you are currently trying to do something, or to let go of the outcome you want.

**Guilt** lets you know you have violated your own standards, and that you need to do something to ensure that you don't violate them again in the future.

*The Emotional Hostage 1986, Cameron-Bandler, L., and Lebeau, M.*



*When I am overwhelmed with the hustle and bustle of my family's busy schedule, I practice Noticing Myself. This helps me to pause when I am overwhelmed and identify why. Then I can adjust what I can, accept what is, or just not yell at my wonderful children.*

*~ Kristie, Director of Business Development*

## Pause. What's the cause?

When you have a conflict, large or small, take a moment and ask yourself to “**Pause. What's the Cause?**” What are the elements of the situation? What is going on with you? What is your body/your emotions telling you? Have one of your values been crossed? What is the story you are telling yourself about the situation?

### Reflective Activity:

1. Think about a situation that happened recently. How did what happened around you impact you? What were you feeling? Think of your emotional response and write out what you think the cause of your emotional response was.

### Practices to Strengthen Noticing Myself:

- **Waiting time noticing.** When waiting for coffee, at stoplights, filling up gas, in line, on hold, or for your computer/phone to load), notice how your body feels. Frustrated? Anxious? What are your emotions telling you?
- **Reflective noticing.** After an off-centered moment, reflect on what happened. What can you notice with hindsight? Can you notice your emotional triggers?
- **Noticing how you treat yourself.** Notice when you are using negative words about yourself and others. Notice how that impacts you, how it makes your body feel, and how it affects your emotional state.



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# Breathing Mindfully

**Moment of Inquiry:** What is the sensation in my body as I breathe?

By stopping and taking slow, full breaths, we calm ourselves. When we pay attention to the sensations of our own breath inside us, we concentrate on our body and bring our mind to rest. Breathing intentionally can help us relax and reduce our stress. In our bodies, breathing mindfully brings our sympathetic and parasympathetic systems into balance, slowing and stabilizing our heart rate. A calm heart opens our mind to thinking more clearly.



*As a mother of three boys, I rely heavily on breathing mindfully! Juggling homework help, dinner, bedtime routines, and the unexpected can feel like a three-ring circus. When you throw sibling arguments into the mix, some deep, mindful breaths are absolutely necessary.*

*~ Ashley, Early Childhood Education Specialist*

## **Activity:** Taking Mindful Breaths

Start with one full breath. Put one hand over your heart and one hand on your belly. Breathe in slowly through your nose while mentally counting to three. Focus on the sensation of fresh air passing through your nostrils and coming into your lungs and be aware of how it feels inside your body as your diaphragm begins to drop and your belly expands and contracts. Pause, relax, and then exhale through your mouth as you release the old air, counting slowly to five. This is one mindful breath.

As you breathe mindfully several more times, focus on the sensations. As you breathe, notice...

- how your breath feels coming into your body
- how your breath feels as it leaves your body
- the exact moment your breath enters your body
- the exact moment your breath leaves your body
- the space in between your breaths

How does awareness of your breath make you feel?

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## Challenge activity: **Schedule Breathing Mindfully**

“Practice makes perfect.” Build your practice by setting your alarm twice a day to remind yourself to stop and take five mindful breaths. A schedule that works for many people is just before you get to work or just before arriving home at the end of your day. Begin to notice throughout the day when you are tense or when you are holding your breath and experiment with taking a few mindful breaths.

*When I find myself being drawn into the chaos of life with three kids, I take a mindful breath and remember what it felt like when my Lola (grandma) would kiss and snuggle with me. That feeling of love and calm becomes a source of strength.*

~ Bryan, Director of Programs



### Practices to Strengthen Mindful Breathing:

- **Start by mindful breathing.** Set your tone for the day by starting off with a practice of deep breathing such as meditation or breathing deeply in nature.
- **Breathing in transitions.** Practice deep, mindful breathing at the start of a meeting, before walking in the door to greet a patient, family member or colleague, before starting a new task, just before arriving at work, or before returning home.
- **Breathing while waiting.** Practice deep, mindful breathing at stoplights, in the waiting room, in line, on hold, or waiting for your computer to power on. Take time out from a jam-packed day by stepping outside of work on a break for a moment of mindful breathing.
- **Breathing in difficult times:** When you get frustrated or the conflict around becomes overwhelming—at home, at school or in the world—take mindful breaths before you speak as a way of calming. Take a mindful breath when you hear difficult news or when you have to prepare for a hard conversation.
- **Breathing for better sleep.** When you are trying to go to sleep, taking deep full breaths while mentally counting in 5 and counting out 8 can help relax you and clear your mind.

*When I wake up in the night, I have trouble going back to sleep. Breathing Mindfully is really helpful in calming all those thoughts from the day that crowd my mind. I can usually go back to sleep after eight to ten mindful breaths.*

~ Lynette, Veterinary Technician





# Nurturing Myself

**Moment of Inquiry:** How can I give myself tender, loving care?

Nurturing ourselves is a skill fundamental to our wellbeing. Our needs are biologically hardwired into us, and ignoring them comes at a risk. This includes our emotional needs—our needs for connection and creativity—as well as our physical needs for healthy food, adequate sleep, exercise, etc.

How can we care for ourselves with compassion? When something difficult happens, we can give ourselves empathy for being in the situation, having to deal with all we have to deal with, and feeling the burden of responsibility. We can forgive ourselves for mistakes and see ourselves as doing the very best we can.

Caring for our physical body is a proven way to reduce the impact of stress on our health, though for many though, it can be the most difficult self-nurturing to do. We function better with healthy eating, quality sleep and moving our bodies regularly. Moreover, we can take better care of those around us when we take care of our own physical selves. If we are angry or frustrated, the best remedy can be some food, a drink of water, sleep, or a walk.

Nurturing ourselves sometimes means being open to goodness from others, such as support, compliments, and caring feedback. How can we accept what others are offering from love? When we are knocked off center, we need to ask ourselves how we can put aside our emotional defenses and be open in this moment. When someone doesn't like something we have done or said, do we get defensive, or can we be open to another perspective? ?



*As a father with two young kids, I have no time. Between work, picking the kids up, getting them fed and into bed, and trying to get chores done, I fall in bed exhausted. My buddy who has kids just a little older has helped me see that things will get a little easier in just a few years. I try to give myself a little compassion and know I am doing the best I can. I know I am a better dad if I am Nurturing Myself and not beating myself up.*

*~ Ricardo, Drafting Technician*

## Activity: Giving Myself Empathy

Sometimes it is difficult to see our own situation with kindness. If you told your friend about what was going on in your life, what would your friend tell you? How would your friend advise you?

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*My daughter has special needs and caring for her can honestly be all consuming. As much as I love her, I had no idea what it would be like to never have time for my own needs. If my parents didn't come and help from time to time, I would go crazy. When she visits, my mom insists I spend time Nurturing Myself, so I can be a better mother to my daughter.*

~ Viktoria, Food Writer

### Activity: **Giving Myself TLC**

1. **Write on a sheet of paper** a list of the actions that you are most likely to need when you are pulled off center. Examples: Eat healthy foods, sleep, find alone time, express my feelings in a healthy way (e.g. talking, creating art, journaling), find reasons to laugh, recognize my own strengths and achievements, do something comforting.
2. **Circle the activity** you most commonly need when you are off center....

*It is good for me to recognize that working out is an important part of Nurturing Myself and Centering. I find I am better at home if I have my workout before making dinner. It helps me deal with the stress of a long day.*



~ Luke, Policy Analyst

### Practices to Strengthen Nurturing Myself:

- **Nurturing your physical self.** Choosing more nutritious food, moving your body, and having a regular sleep cycle will nurture you at the most basic level.
- **Letting in compliments.** When someone gives you a compliment or appreciation, practice letting in the positive words and feeling the appreciation.
- **Letting in your own genius.** Recognize and honor your own gifts, talents, accomplishments, and personal genius. Each of us is uniquely gifted in an extraordinary way. Letting in your own goodness is transformative.
- **Nurturing your emotional needs.** Take some time for personal connection and/or creativity: call a friend, create dinner/a letter/a drawing/dance/sing/garden/play a game or anything else that strengthens relationships and taps into your creativity instead of chilling in front of the TV or social media.
- **Communicating your needs.** Let your family members or colleagues know when you need time/space to regroup your energy and nurture yourself.
- **Letting in the good of others.** Our minds are designed to be judgmental. How often do you find yourself judging someone else (especially a colleague, friend, or family member)? How can you let in their goodness first?
- **Letting in caring feedback.** When someone who cares about you makes a suggestion about how you might view situations or do things differently, "try on" the new viewpoint or action.



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## Letting Go

**Moment of Inquiry:** What is not in my control that it would be helpful for me to let go of?

In any situation, we may carry too much baggage—words or actions that might have been hurtful, or feelings that are not serving us any more. Holding onto them becomes an unconscious habit. Sometimes, we hold things so long that we don't even notice we are carrying them. We can let go of “yucky” feelings or stories about a situation that we do not want to take with us. When we have a hard time letting go of something, it may be an indicator to use our courage to address what needs addressing, or change our behavior or expectations. If we don't need it? Set it aside.



*I can't stand the political comments my brother makes on social media. He can make me really angry. Before we get together, I have to work on Letting Go so that I can be civil to him.*

~ Paul, Systems Administrator

### Activity: **Inventory of Items That Weigh Us Down**

1. Take a moment to think of things that are weighing you down. Are there things people have said to you that you are still holding on to? Are you upset with others in your life? Are there things you have done that you are beating yourself up over? Write each one of these things on a separate small slip of paper.
2. Now, think about whether you have control over those things. Which would be helpful for you to let go of? Crumple up that piece of paper and throw it away. Literally throwing the paper like a ball can give our bodies a sense of “getting rid of something.”

*My coworker is always making little digs. I have to use Letting Go to forgive her pettiness everyday to make it through my shift. It's just about her and I know she has a tough life.*



~ Agnes, Line Operator

### Practices to Strengthen Letting Go:



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- **Letting go of annoyances.** When you find yourself getting wound up by annoyances (being cut off in traffic, out of coffee, a slow internet), notice that it is not in your control and practice just letting it go.
- **Letting go of the hurt.** When someone says something hurtful, you can ask yourself: Isn't their comment more about them (their needs, insecurities, etc) than about me? Then let it go.
- **Letting go in review.** When you are winding down for the evening, review the events of the day and ask yourself—what negativity from the day can I let go of?



*I run into people being jerks all time—in big and small ways. Sometimes it is on purpose and sometimes they are just thoughtless. Letting Go helps me keep moving and focus on my goals.*

*~ Mi-kyong , Web Developer*





## Finding Gratitude

**Moment of Inquiry:** What am I grateful for in myself, others, life?

Gratitude profoundly affects our sense of well-being. When we focus on gratitude, our emotional resilience goes up. In most situations, there is something you can find to be grateful for—though we might have to work a bit to see it. During disagreements with our loved ones, if we hold onto one thing we care about in that other person, we can more easily come up with suggestions that might work for both parties. Even during intense situations, if we find one thing to be grateful for, we reduce our stress. With a focus on finding gratitude, many times what seemed large and insurmountable becomes a problem that can be solved or a situation that will change over time.

*I used to be annoyed all the time—people cutting me off in traffic, cashiers that were too slow, micro-management by my boss. Once I started keeping a gratitude journal, it really changed my attitude. Now I can take the annoyances in life without it ruining my whole day.*



~ Vikram, Tech Sales

### Activity: **What are you grateful for?**

Make a list of ten things in your life you are grateful for. Share this list with at least one person in your life and notice how it makes you feel.

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*Even when Taylor was in the hospital, I focused on Finding Gratitude each day. It was still really tough, but it made the ups and downs just a little bit easier.*



~ Laura, Caterer

### Challenge Activity: **Week of Gratitude**

Every day for a week, write down three things for which you are grateful. Write different things each day. Notice how this impacts you.

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## Challenge Activity: **Gratitude In the Moment**

Take one minute to think about your day and a stressful situation that happened. Think about one thing you are grateful for about that situation or person.

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How might it change your stressful situations if you can find gratitude during the moment?



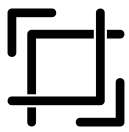
*Thanksgiving is a daily ritual around here. I go down on my knees and thank God for all He has given me. I make sure all my grandchildren do the same.*

*~ Hannah, Retired Postal Worker*

### Practices to Strengthen Finding Gratitude:

- **Daily gratitude review.** Before bed, come up with three things from your day for which you are grateful.
- **Meal gratitude.** As you sit down to eat, pause for a moment in gratitude. Even if you don't have the meal that you want, you are able to be nourished.
- **Meeting gratitude.** At the beginning of meetings, pause to be grateful for your opportunity and for the people attending and their gifts.
- **Gratitude for yourself.** Write a list of your strengths and talents and be grateful for what you offer to the world and to those around you.





## Positive Reframing

**Moment of Inquiry:** How can I see the glass half full and find the positive?

Our words shape our reality. We create the stories we tell ourselves about the world, ourselves, and others. Reframing means paying attention to our inner narrative. What story are we telling ourselves? Can we be curious and open to a different way of seeing? Is there an alternative story that might be equally true? When we change the story, we change the meaning, and we change whether something is empowering or disempowering for us. Sometimes, we need to step back and gain perspective on what we are experiencing. We might then be able to find the positive intent behind someone's negative behaviour. Lightheartedness and humor can help us see the situation with more positivity.



*I couldn't run my company without Positive Reframing or as I call it, "flipping the narrative." Every time we run into an obstacle, I have to convince our investors that it is a new opportunity for us, that it will help us get to where we want to go. So far, it has worked.*

~ André, Entrepreneur

*When I was growing up, my aunt used to constantly brag about her daughter's achievements. Every holiday, I would cringe because I would have to hear about my cousin's latest gymnastic award or her great grades. I felt so put down by the constant comparison. It was only later that I realized my aunt was doing it because her husband had left and she was pouring her life into her daughter. And all those comparisons spurred me on to do better academically and achieve my goals. My cousin and I have a much better relationship now that I have Positively Reframed it.*



~ Gina, Waitress

### Activity: **Reframe To Expand Our Perspective**

Reframing helps us make new meaning quickly and easily. You can reframe a problem as an opportunity, a weakness as a strength, negativity as neutral and unkindness as lack of understanding. Practice reframing these situations into the positive. You might want to do this with a partner.

Take any example and consider the story you tell yourself about it. Maybe the story that you are telling is not the story others would have. What is an alternate story that will help you feel better about what is happening. We often make things about ourselves, instead of understanding it is not about us.



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## Examples

- You are totally stuck in traffic.
  - You have a grumpy cashier at the grocery store.
  - A colleague did not complete her tasks so you have to work extra hours.
  - Your boss keeps asking you to do a project that you feel is a waste of time.
  - Your mom complains that you don't call enough.
  - Your partner burns dinner.
  - You have a grumpy cashier at the grocery store.
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## Practices to Strengthen Positive Reframing:

- **Reframing mistakes.** When you make a mistake, recognize that you have been given an opportunity to learn.
- **Rewind to reframe.** As soon as you notice you are getting off center, 'rewind' to the moment it happened and reframe with a new perspective as soon as you can. Catch it before it grows into something larger.
- **Reframing obstacles.** Practice changing the way you see obstacles, so that instead they become opportunities for growth, to do something you had not thought of before.
- **Reframing negativity.** When people present to you with negativity, try viewing their energy as their issue, that you don't have to absorb.



*I could hardly sleep. When I realized my mistake, that I had shipped the order before the check cleared and now it had bounced, I was really bothered by my screwup. I had never dreamed that one of our clients would do that. After my boss talked to me, I realized that I had to let it go, and used Positive Reframing to see it differently. I had learned an expensive mistake that I would not forget. I am now meticulous in double checking payment has cleared before I send out orders!*

~ Luisa, Fulfillment Specialist





## Moments of Inquiry:

- **Noticing Myself:** What am I noticing/sensing/feeling?
- **Breathing Mindfully:** What is the sensation in my body as I breathe?
- **Letting Go:** What is not in my control that it would be helpful for me to let go of?
- **Finding Gratitude:** What am I grateful for in myself, others, life?
- **Nurturing Myself:** How can I give myself tender loving care?
- **Positive Reframing:** How can I see the glass half full and find the positive?

