

DECEMBER 2020

# Trauma Responsive Educator

*Strengthening the capacity of educators to meet the needs of students coping with trauma*



**'Tis The Season For  
Mindful Self-Care**

[TREPEducator.org/magazine](https://TREPEducator.org/magazine)



## Project Director's Note

We are facing unprecedented events—news and social media are flooded with information and disinformation about how to protect our health while waiting for the vaccine. Let's close out 2020 by also protecting our mental and emotional selves.

What can I say other than 2020 has been a doozy! Educators are living through an especially difficult year for the intersecting strains of **compassion fatigue** (the emotional strain of providing support to others who are suffering from traumatic experiences), and **stress-based burnout** (the overwhelming set of expectations and responsibilities at work and at home).

Of the million and one self-care activities that I could suggest, I will focus on what I believe is a truly transformative and everyday practice: mindful self-care. It is also supported by research showing that it is an effective and sustainable strategy for buffering against compassion fatigue and burnout.

I define mindful self-care as engaging in a variety of brief mindfulness practices that focus on using your breath to pause and center yourself in the present moment—using your breath to push out regrets of the past and worries of the future.

Micere Keels

*The watercolor images presented on these pages are designed to help you engage in a moment of present moment mindfulness.*



## Mindful Self-Care

For a moment—lasting the length of just one deep breath or maybe a full minute—allow yourself to non-judgmentally connect with your thoughts, your feelings, and your body.

You don't need a special space to do this. You can ground yourself in the present moment wherever you are. You can do this while sitting at your desk. You can get up and walk around taking deep breaths with each slow step. You can stand still, or you can stretch.

Over time, regular engagement with brief moments of mindfulness can increase your ability to regulate your emotions and tolerate emotional strains. The effects of mindfulness can also extend your ability to manage professional and personal frustrations.

Follow us [@TREPPProject](#) to have our [#MindfulSelfCare](#) challenge nudge you into making this part of your daily life.





# Begin

Here's how to begin, based on an exercise adapted from The Foundation for a Mindful Society:

- **Set aside some time to begin**, all you need is a few moments of time and some space—it doesn't even need to be a quiet space. You just need to quiet yourself in whatever space you are in.
- **Observe the present moment**, including your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. You are not trying to achieve a state of meditative calm. You are paying attention to and accepting the present moment for what it is.
- **Notice and release your judgments** by accepting all your thoughts, feelings, and sensations as being neither good nor bad, but simply as part of your human experience.
- **Actively engage in self-compassion** by not judging your wandering mind. When you notice your mind wandering, gently return, again and again, to the present moment.



## Variations to Try

Mindfulness involves intentional breathing, focused attention, and subtle movements. Consider the practices below and try the ones that that resonate with you.

### BREATH MANTRA

Say, “breathe in, breathe out”, to yourself, as you walk. This can be audible or silent. Pay particular attention to what is happening around you, as you walk. Also, without judgement, notice the emotions that arise as you walk.

### MINDFUL MOMENT

Play some instrumental music that encourages you to get up and move your body. As you move, pay attention to how the music sounds, how it makes you feel, the feelings in your body as well as any thoughts or emotions that may arise. Move and observe without judgement.

### BREATH SIGNALS

Integrate a list of breath signals throughout the day, such as when you finish a TV episode, before or after eating, or before using the stove or microwave. Each deep breath sends a message to your brain to slow down and relax.

### EXPLORE DIGITAL RESOURCES

There are a plethora of audio- and video-recorded mindfulness practices online, as well as apps for your smartphone. Explore and find a limited number of varied practices that you can integrate into your life, at home and at work.

### STANDING MEDITATION

Place your arms by your sides; place your feet shoulder-width distance apart; and begin to focus on the soles of your feet. Feel the connection between your feet and the ground. Assume a strong upright position and take deep breaths. On the breath in, tense up. On the breath out, send release to any areas of tension in your body. Start by tensing the muscles in your legs and then releasing them, move up to your stomach, then shoulders, fists, and face; tensing and releasing as you go. Work your way back down to your feet. Continue for as long as you feel is necessary.



Mindfulness includes acceptance of present-moment realities while not necessarily submitting to the idea that the present moment is indicative of the future.

## About the TREP Project

The [Trauma Responsive Educational Practices \(TREP\) Project](#) is a research-practice-translation project that works to connect research on the science of trauma with the realities of school and classroom management. We support educators in creating schools and classrooms that meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students coping with toxic levels of stress and trauma.