



***Got Stress? We can help!***

# **Caregiver Support Program**

**(Self-paced for home use)**



## **ProActive Caring Program**

Developed by the Center on Aging and Disability Policy  
at Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, NY

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# Introduction

Welcome to Proactive Caring, “Teaching Mindfulness to Support Family Members of Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.”

ProActive Caring was created as a partnership between service providers and family caregivers, to support you as you care for a person with special needs. Caregivers often describe themselves as feeling stressed or overwhelmed by anxiety about the future, by the judgments (or denial) or family members and friends, by the bureaucracies they have to deal with, by financial pressures, and sometimes even by caring for more than one family member.

In fact, the stresses associated with being a family caregiver of someone with an intellectual or developmental disability can be so great that it is not uncommon for caregivers introducing themselves and their situation to other caregivers in a group, to burst into tears! Unlike other support programs, such as respite care, that may address certain aspects of caregiver stress, ProActive Caring aims to help you develop coping skills and build resilience to current and future stress.

The ProActive Caring e-Manual will lead you through eight modules and accompanying exercises that teach strategies to enhance your sense of well-being and reduce the stress you experience in your role as a caregiver.

We wish you well as you begin your journey towards better physical, mental, and emotional health and towards a more joyful and fulfilling life. Please know that we are always here for you! You will find our contact information on our website [www.proactivecaring.org](http://www.proactivecaring.org).

## Initial Questions

- What brought you to this program?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- What types of support would you like to have as a caregiver?

## The Parent/Caregiver Perspective

Parents/caregivers have a unique perspective

- What does this statement mean to you?
- Why does it have this meaning for you?
- How does it apply to family? Education? Medical care? Your child's future? Your own life?

# Module 1: Stress

## Stress: What is it? How is it experienced?

### What stress does to a person:

Here are some ways that our bodies react to stress:

**Body:** Headaches, muscle pain/tension, chest pain, fatigue, change in libido, stomach upset, sleep problems

**Mood:** Anxiety, restlessness, lack of motivation/focus, feeling overwhelmed, irritability/anger, sadness/depression

**Behavior:** overeating/undereating, outbursts, drug/alcohol misuse, tobacco use, social withdrawal, less exercise

-- Mayo Clinic (2019)

### What does stress look like for you?

There are certain situations that you find stressful, and your body reacts in a certain way. Take a few moments to think about the events that cause you stress and what happens to you when you experience those stressful events. Do your stressors have to do with lack of control, time, or knowledge? Administrative and other concerns? Interpersonal relationships? Student academics and behaviors? Family, etc.?

Here is an example: *When my child has a behavior in public, I feel sick to my stomach.*

When ____ happens...	Then ____ happens...
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

# Module 1: Stress

## Strategies for dealing with stress

You probably have found some strategies for dealing with stress already. Think about what works for you. Then brainstorm some methods for dealing with stress that you can try. You will learn more through this program.

**Strategies I use already...**

**Strategies I can try...**

## Feeling Responsible

When we feel responsible but don't have control, we can experience depression. What are some of the "shoulds" in your life? What do you feel obligated to do? Do you have control over each one?

**My "Shoulds"**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**Do I really have control?**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Can Mindfulness help?

Let's end with a three-minute period of silence. Just stopping is a move toward being more mindful. Start by adding a half-smile. Be quiet for these three minutes. In future modules, you will learn some other ways to calm yourself during these times as you become more mindful.

**How do you feel?**



# Module 1: Mindful Thoughts

## Day 1

*“Your present circumstances don’t determine where you can go, they merely determine where you start.” — Nido Qubein*

- Take some time to rejoice over the new beginning that you are starting today.

## Day 2

*“Resistance creates suffering. Stress happens when your mind resists what is. The only problem in your life is your mind’s resistance to life as it unfolds.” — Dan Millman*

- Change is often difficult for people. Consider a change in your life that is causing you stress. Can you think of a different way to think about that change that brings acceptance?

## Day 3

*“Stress is caused by being ‘here’ but wanting to be ‘there.’” — Eckhart Tolle*

- Take a few moments to think about the parts of where you are now that you wouldn’t trade. What are the parts that make you want to be where you are now?

## Day 4

- *“He who worries about calamities suffers them twice over.” — Og Mandino*

Think about how much you are worried about something that hasn’t happened yet. If you worry about what could happen and then worry once something does happen, you essentially suffer twice. Can you eliminate half your stress by not worrying about what might happen?

## Day 5

*“When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.” — Winston Churchill*

- Think about a potential event about which you worried, but which never came true. How often does this happen in your life? Is there something like that occurring now?

## Day 6

*“Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.” — Chinese proverb*

- Think about this proverb. Find some time today to relax and enjoy who you are.

# Module 2: Discovering Mindfulness

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a new way of being aware and seeing:

- Focusing too much on the past may lead to regret and depression
- Focusing too much on the future may lead to anxiety
- Instead, be in the present

Mindfulness enhances our ability to handle stressful situations.

## Learning to Breathe

You may think that you know how to breathe, but perhaps you don't! This seems silly but think about how you breathe when you are stressed. You take short, shallow breaths, right? Try breathing like this:

1. Breathe in through your nose and count slowly as you inhale. The air should make your belly rise. You can put a beanie baby (or some other light object) on your stomach and breathe lying down to see if you can make it rise as you inhale. If you don't have anything, just put your hand on your belly and feel it rise when you inhale.
2. Breathe out through your mouth and count slowly as you exhale. The air should empty from your lungs. You should be able to see or feel your belly go back down as you exhale.
3. Try to extend the lengths of your breaths gradually.

## 3-Minute Breathing Exercise: Focusing on Breath

Let's try a three-minute breathing exercise to practice. Start with your half-smile. Counting slowly, focus on your breath (and expanding your belly when you inhale through your nose). Counting slowly, focus on your breath when you empty your lungs and exhale through your mouth. Try to extend your breath gradually. Remember that reality is in the present moment. Return your mind to your breath, where you are, and who you are right now.



# Module 2: Discovering Mindfulness

## The Experience

Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

### What thoughts went through your mind?

- Were you judging yourself?
- Were you thinking: “I should really be doing something useful/important?”
- Did you experience watching the thoughts – observing your own mind?

### Why do we do this?

- To stop
- To listen
- To notice and more clearly see reality
- To slow down and feel more in control
- What kinds of breathing exercise do you do? What would you do? When?

## Managing Attitudes

In his book, *Full Catastrophe Living*, the psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn identifies attitudes as very important to facing life’s challenges as they build self-compassion and human capacity. As we read through the attitudes below, think about where you are now.

- Which attitudes(s) have you already developed? (Star those!)
- Which attitude(s) are you trying to develop? (Circle those!)

## Mindful Attitudes List

**A. Beginner’s Mind** – We are open to new possibilities

**B. Non-judging** – We see without pre-set ideas

**C. Acceptance** – We accept things as they are

**D. Letting go** – We set fear aside and make peace with our lives

**E. Trust** – We can trust our minds and bodies to help us heal

**F. Patience** — We need not rush ahead; we are doing something important in the present

**G. Non-striving** – We should abandon the “if only” mindset, appreciate what we have (this is not to say we should not plan)

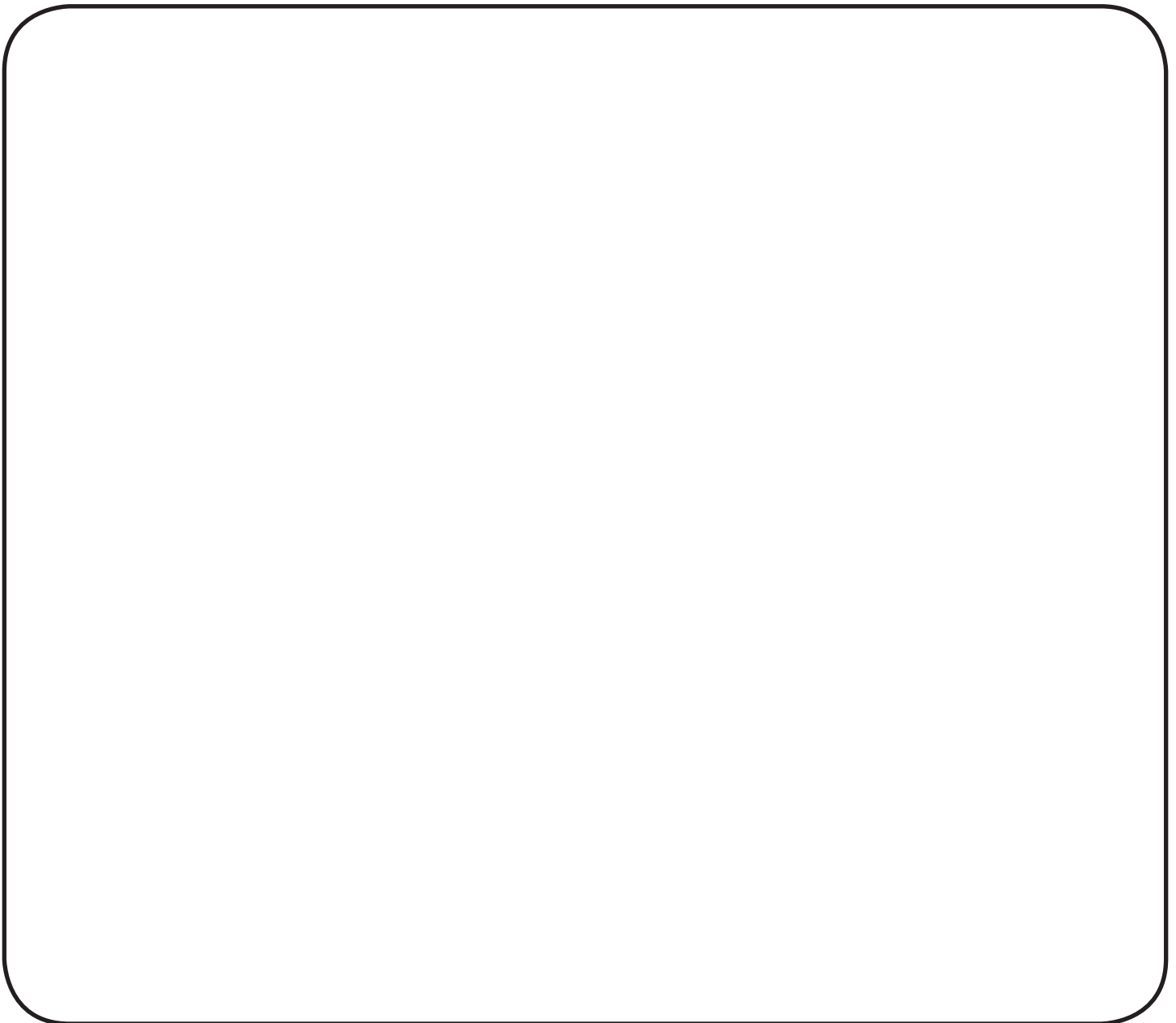
**H. Gratitude** – We should regularly be thankful for what we have, and let those in our lives know we appreciate them



# Module 2: Discovering Mindfulness

## Journaling

Journaling is a very powerful strategy for helping you become mindful. Putting thoughts and feelings into words forces you to be mindful of them. Try journaling about the attitudes you identified in yourself from the previous page. Throughout the week, add to this journal. See how you feel after writing for just a few minutes per day. Try recording some of your thoughts here in this box.



# Module 2: Mindful Thoughts

## Day 1

*“If you want to conquer the anxiety of life, live in the moment, live in the breath.” — Amit Ray*

- Remember to practice your breathing exercises today and every day forward.

## Day 2

*“Nowhere you can go is more peaceful — more free of interruptions — than your own soul. .... An instant’s recollection, and there it is: complete tranquility. And by tranquility, I mean a kind of harmony. So keep getting away from it all — like that. Renew yourself. But keep it brief and basic. A quick visit should be enough to ward off all ... and send you back ready to face what awaits you.”*

—Marcus Aurelius

- Mindfulness is nothing new. Think about the stresses of a Roman Emperor. Can you renew yourself in the same way?

## Day 3

*“The woods are lovely, dark and deep. / But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep, / And miles to go before I sleep.” — Robert Frost*

- The conflict between taking care of ourselves and the busy-ness of our lives is also not new. Think of an excuse for not pausing to be mindful today. Then let it go and practice being mindful.

## Day 4

*“Nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.” — William Shakespeare*

- Remember to work on your mindful attitudes today.

## Day 5

*“Things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out.” — John Wooden*

- Investigate your thoughts about “how things are” through journaling today.

## Day 6

*“The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them.”*

— Antoine de Saint-Exupery

- Think about those things in your life that have the most meaning to you.



# Module 3: Mindful Perception

## 4-Minute Breathing Exercise: Visualization

Let's try a four-minute breathing exercise. Start with your half-smile. Focus on your breath (counting slowly as you inhale and exhale). Feel your belly rise as you inhale and your lungs empty as you exhale. Remember that reality is in the present moment, where you are and who you are right now.

“Imagine yourself as a pebble that has been thrown into a river. The pebble sinks through the water effortlessly. Detached from everything, it falls by the shortest distance possible, finally reaching the bottom, the point of perfect rest. You are like a pebble which has let itself fall into the river, letting go of everything. At the center of your being is your breath .... When you feel yourself resting like a pebble which has reached the riverbed, that is the point when you begin to find your own rest. You are no longer pushed or pulled by anything.” (Hanh, 1976)



Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

- Were you able to reach that point of rest?
- How do you feel now?

# Module 3: Mindful Perception

## How we perceive events

Why does perception matter? How we perceive what is happening affects how our bodies and minds react to the world around us.

### Habits of Thinking

- Optimism -- Blame Circumstances/ Will get better
- Pessimism – Blame Self/ Will not get better
- Which habit do you have most frequently?
- What is the difference between blaming yourself and taking responsibility (and seeing an opportunity for growth)?

### How Optimism Works

Optimism works when we do the following:

- We give specific reasons to locate adversity/ negatives in a place and time and not the person
- We consider all the evidence
- We look for the positives and write them out
- We avoid overgeneralizing from one event to other events
- We focus on what we hope to achieve

### Avoiding Overgeneralizations

Sometimes we overgeneralize by taking one example and expanding it to represent more.

Example: One misbehavior and consequence turns into “I AM bad (in general)” or “I NEVER do anything right” or “You ALWAYS yell at me”

- We can remind ourselves and others not to overgeneralize by asking, “And the truth is?”



# Module 3: Mindful Perception

## Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence

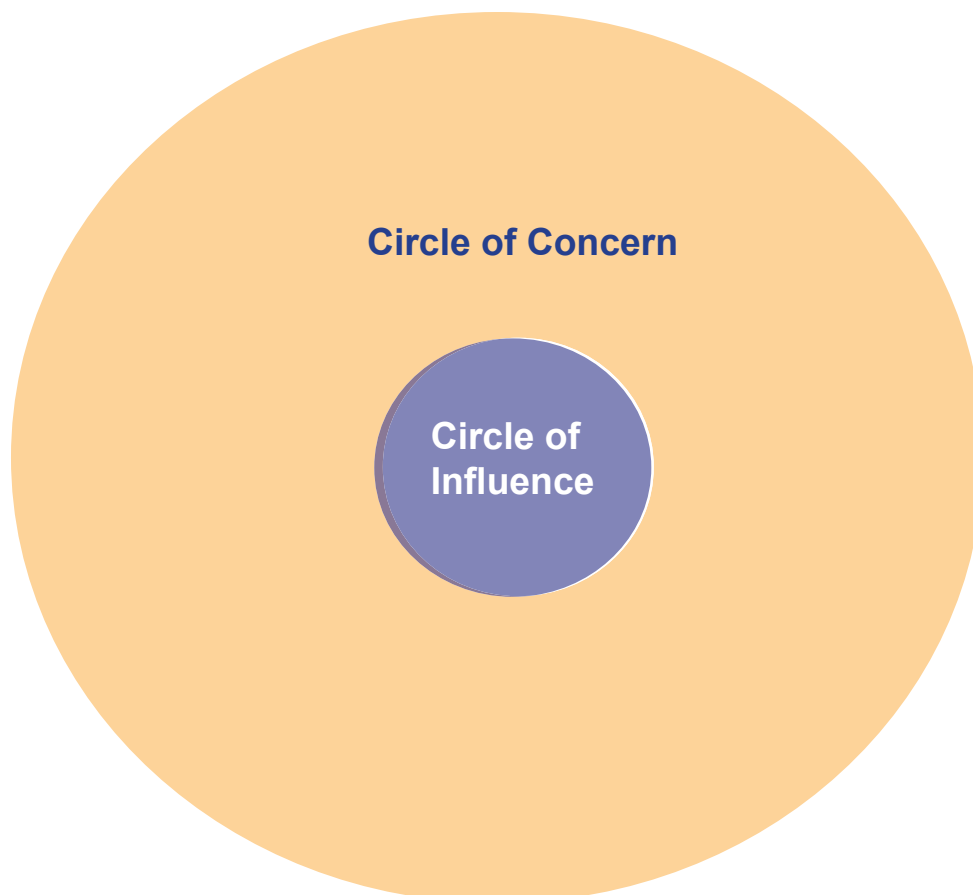
In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), Stephen Covey mentions a way to think about what we can control in our lives:

**Circle of Concern:** Covers everything we care about (including all our personal concerns and our more global concerns)

**Circle of Influence:** Smaller circle covers only that which we have the power to affect or change

Write those things that are in your Circle of Influence first (what you truly have the power to control). Then write those things that you care about but cannot control in your Circle of Concern.

My Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence:



# Module 3: Mindful Perception

## Stress Ranking Scale

Sometimes, when we are in a stressful moment, we have a hard time determining whether something is a disaster or simply a bump in the road. If we are already stressed, something that may be considered minor at other times may seem catastrophic in that moment. When we experience a stressful situation, we may find it helpful to think about the situation in terms of other events (i.e., like stubbing a toe for a minor event to losing a limb for a major event), and we may want to think about how “fixable” something is.

On the scale below, give examples for each scale ranking that are meaningful to you. Consider “1” as a really minor event and “10” as a really major event.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

1 =

2 =

3 =

4 =

5 =

6 =

7 =

8 =

9 =

10 =

## Reframing

Think about a situation where someone you know blamed someone for something that the person didn't do. That may have created a negative perception about something that may have been a neutral occurrence. In his book, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (2006), Martin Seligman described a method for “reframing” our perceptions about events in our lives. Try a couple of these reframes using the ABCDE template below and some situations with which you are dealing right now.

# Module 3: Mindful Perception

## Reframing ABCDE #1

**Adversity** – What needs to be reframed?

**Bad event:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Beliefs** – How do you see the event?

**Perspective:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequences** – What do you do?

**Actions Taken:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Disputation of Beliefs** – How can you look at the event differently? What is the evidence versus your perspective? Are there other possible causes? Is it or is it not a catastrophe?

**Energy** – What do you feel and do now?

**New Frame:**

## Reframing ABCDE #2

**Adversity** – What needs to be reframed?

**Bad event:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Beliefs** – How do you see the event?

**Perspective:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consequences** – What do you do?

**Actions Taken:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Disputation of Beliefs** – How can you look at the event differently? What is the evidence versus your perspective? Are there other possible causes? Is it or is it not a catastrophe?

**Energy** – What do you feel and do now?

**New Frame:**



# Module 3: Mindful Thoughts

## Mindful Perception

### Day 1

*"You can't always control what goes on outside, but you can always control what goes on inside."*  
— Wayne Dyer

- Remember to practice your breathing exercises daily. Visualize something calming that allows you to stay "inside" and not worry about "outside" for a few moments.

### Day 2

*"Choose to be optimistic, it feels better."* — Dalai Lama

- Take some time now to state out loud what WILL go right today.

### Day 3

*"Optimism refuses to believe that the road ends without options."* — Robert H. Schuller

Think about a situation where you feel "stuck." Take some time today to brainstorm options for what you can do in that situation.

### Day 4

*"Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny."* — Mahatma Gandhi

- Try writing down your negative thoughts in your journal and then writing down a more positive form of those thoughts.

### Day 5

*"Our anxiety does not come from thinking about the future, but from wanting to control it."*  
— Kahlil Gibran

- Revisit your circles of concern and influence. Are you truly thinking about what you control differently?

### Day 6

*"It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it."* — Lou Holtz

- Check what strategies you are using to deal with stress. Is there a new strategy you can try today?

# Module 4: Mindful Awareness

## 5-Minute Breathing Exercise: Sensory Grounding

Let's try a five-minute breathing exercise. Start with your half-smile. Focus on your breath (counting slowly as you inhale and exhale). Feel your belly rise as you inhale and your lungs empty as you exhale. Remember that reality is in the present moment, where you are and who you are right now.

Focus only on what you hear....

Then on what you feel....

Then on what you smell....

If you are not closing your eyes, focus on what you see.

If you are closing your eyes, visualize something calming and focus on the details.

Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

- Were you able to isolate each of your senses?
- Did you experience sensations of which you were not aware prior to the exercise?
- How do you feel now?

## Positive Aspects of Caregiving

Being mindful includes being always aware of our purpose. Keep your answers to the following question at the forefront of your mind:

What are the rewards (positive aspects) of parenting/ caregiving?



# Module 4: Mindful Awareness

Does caregiving provide you with the following?

**Positive Emotions** – That which is positive in life that you experience

**Engagement** – Being active in something that fully engages all of you

**Meaning** – Other centeredness that gives our lives greater meaning

**Gratitude** – What we are thankful for and what has gone well

What other activities do you do (outside of caregiving)?



If something you are doing satisfies none of the four criteria, ask yourself whether you should continue doing that activity. Can you say “no” to something?

## Awareness Building by Paying Attention

Mindfulness is not an activity that is reserved for a certain time of day or particular place. It is an awareness that comes from paying attention to what is happening in the present moment with an accepting and open state of mind. Mindfulness is something for which you can strive all day long, every day.

In his book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, Thich Nhat Hanh (1976) describes how you can create awareness while you are washing the dishes:

- Take your time, relax, and focus on your breath
- Notice the temperature and feel of the water
- Notice the sound of the water hitting the dish
- Notice the colors and movement of the water over the dish
- Notice yourself scrubbing the dish and picking up one dish at a time
- Let thoughts pass through and let them go....

If you can, try this now with something you need to do around the house!

# Module 4: Mindful Awareness

Thich Nhat Hanh (1976) also mentions other strategies for building awareness through paying attention:

- Practice mindful eating
- Take 30 minutes to eat at work (with no work!)
- Be aware of what food is entering your body
- Give yourself permission to multitask!
- Ground yourself
- Unplug for part of the day
- Be in nature or tend a garden
- Set a bell/timer at regular intervals to remind you to stop and practice mindfulness
- Apps available to help you

## Setting Intentions

Choose an activity or part of your day when you can build awareness.

Practice mindfulness each day during the activity or time of day.

I will build awareness when....

How I feel when I build awareness during this activity/time of day:

Gradually add other activities. Eventually, you can set aside a Mindfulness Day!

# Module 4: Mindful Thoughts

## Day 1

*"You can observe a lot by just watching"* — Yogi Berra

- Remember to practice your breathing exercises this week. Try to ground yourself in your senses, focusing on each sense in turn.

## Day 2

*"A man sees in the world what he carries in his heart."* — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

- Focus today on the positive aspects of being a parent/caregiver. Consider writing them again in your journal. See how your focus on these positive aspects changes your perspective on everything you do as a parent/caregiver today.

## Day 3

*"It is not the daily increase, but a daily decrease. Hack away at the inessentials."*

— Bruce Lee

- Consider those activities that you do that do not provide fulfillment. Choose one for which you can say 'no' and not feel guilty.

## Day 4

*"One of the best pieces of advice I ever got was from a horse master. He told me to go slow to go fast. I think that applies to everything in life. We live as though there aren't enough hours in the day, but if we do each thing calmly and carefully, we will get it done quicker and with much less stress."*

— Viggo Mortensen

- Choose an activity to 'unitask' today. Be fully aware and present during this activity, not allowing your thoughts and worries to interfere.

## Day 5

*"Slow down and everything you are chasing will come around and catch you."* — John De Paola

- Think about something you are trying to accomplish. Break down the goal into separate tasks with deadlines. Does that make it seem more do-able?

## Day 6

*"Be happy in the moment, that's enough. Each moment is all we need, not more."* — Mother Teresa

- Choose a way to reward yourself today. Be happy and present in that moment.

# Module 5: Mindful Growth

## 5-Minute Breathing Exercise: Body Scan

Let's try a five-minute breathing exercise. Start with your half-smile. Focus on your breath (counting slowly as you inhale and exhale). Feel your belly rise as you inhale and your lungs empty as you exhale. Remember that reality is in the present moment, where you are and who you are right now.

Relax starting at the top of your head.... Your forehead.... Your eyebrows.... Your facial muscles.... Your neck.... Your shoulders.... Your upper arms.... Your lower arms.... Your hands.... Your fingers.... Your back.... Your hips.... Your upper legs.... Your knees.... Your lower legs.... Your ankles.... Your feet.... Your toes....

Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

- Were you able to isolate and relax each part of your body?
- How do you feel now?

## From Grief to Acceptance

The journey from grief, anger, pain, and suffering to acceptance, hope and compassion is a process. It both happens to us (involuntary) and is something that we can shape (voluntary), and it is okay to feel all the emotions. When you reach acceptance, you can live fully within the stressful situations. You can still love and find a special joy, and you can achieve hope and compassion.

## Hope

Achieving hope means that you must continue to believe that you can reach your intended goal, take care of yourself, and expect that a positive outcome will occur. Taking care of yourself means being easy on yourself, scheduling "Me Time," planning rewards for yourself, and looking at life with compassion. Having hope demonstrates the interaction between thoughts and actions. Here are some activities to help you achieve a hopeful state of mind:



# Module 5: Mindful Growth

## Believe in Yourself: “I Can” Activity

If you have another person present, try this activity. Hold up your arm parallel to the floor. Have the other person gently press down on your arm while you say “I can’t” repeatedly. Notice how much effort you need to use to keep your arm parallel to the floor.

Now repeat the activity while saying “I can” repeatedly instead of “I can’t.” Make sure the other person applies the same amount of pressure both times. Again, notice how much effort you need to use to keep your arm parallel to the floor. Ask whether your partner noticed any difference in how difficult it was to keep your arm parallel to the floor.

If you want, switch roles so that the other person can experience the activity as well.

- How do you feel after this activity?
- What does this tell you about self-talk?

## Take Care of Yourself: “Me Time”

Think about activities that calm you or that you enjoy. List those activities here:

Pick one to put on your schedule this week as a reward for yourself:



# Module 5: Mindful Growth

## Have Hope: “The Miracle of Chinese Bamboo” (Dye, 2009)

[Click here](#) to watch a video.

- What are your thoughts?
- How can you apply this to your life?



## From Guilt to Forgiveness

Sometimes our path to acceptance and hope and happiness is challenged by feelings of guilt. Let's consider how we can forgive ourselves and others and get back on the path.

- Do we feel guilt?
- What is this feeling?
- What does guilt feel like to you?
- Finding forgiveness and self-compassion
- Following a path to happiness
- Being aware of our own needs
- Knowing we have more control than we realize
- Keeping in mind all that we are doing
- Thinking of the gifts we give to others daily

# Module 5: Mindful Growth

## REACHing for Forgiveness of Ourselves and Others

Everett Worthington, an expert on forgiveness, came up with these steps to forgiveness:

- **Recall:** Remember the hurt and decide to forgive anyway
- **Empathize:** Try to empathize with the circumstances that may have led us or the other person to act that way (consider picturing the other person or yourself in an empty chair; say what you want to say, and then sit in the chair and respond)
- **Altruism:** Give the gift of forgiveness, although it may not be deserved or earned, and allow that person (or you) to feel lighter and freer
- **Commit:** Offer a public statement of forgiveness by writing down your forgiveness of yourself or others
- **Hold:** Keep the feelings of forgiveness with you by writing “notes of commitment” (Worthington, 2020)

Take a few moments to run through these steps for someone who needs forgiving. Use this space, if you want, to write down the steps as they apply to that scenario:

**R**

**E**

**A**

**C**

**H**

# Module 5: Mindful Thoughts

## Day 1

*“Life is a journey, not a destination.” — Author Unknown*

- Take some time to reflect on the progress you have made on your journey of beginning again. What practices and strategies are you now doing? How are you feeling?

## Day 2

*“Life is a daily cleansing. Negativity must be washed away if you wish to attract positive experiences to your life.” — Leon Brown*

- Try your breathing exercise with the body scan, relaxing each part of your body in turn from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. As you relax each part of your body, wash away the negativity.

## Day 3

*“One can choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.” — Viktor Frankl*

- Viktor Frankl was a concentration camp prisoner who survived horrendous conditions. Can you gain motivation from his story of choosing a strong attitude to push through challenges?

## Day 4

*“You are braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.” — Christopher Robin*

- Write in your journal all your strengths. Why CAN you do whatever you set your mind to do?

## Day 5

*“I don’t like that man. I must get to know him better.” — Abraham Lincoln*

- Focus today on getting to know and/or forgiving someone for whom you have negative thoughts. REACH for forgiveness.

## Day 6

*“If you own this story, you get to write the ending.” — Brené Brown*

- Give yourself some “me time” today. Do an activity that you enjoy or find your own enjoyment in an activity that you are doing.

# Module 6: Mindful Happiness

## 5-Minute Breathing Exercise: Loving Kindness

Let's try a five-minute breathing exercise. Start with your half-smile. Focus on your breath (counting slowly as you inhale and exhale).

Feel your belly rise as you inhale and your lungs empty as you exhale. Remember that reality is in the present moment, where you are and who you are right now.

Focus on yourself first and say words of loving kindness (May I be happy, May I be peaceful, May I be healthy....)

Then focus on someone you care about and say words of loving kindness (May he/she be happy, May he/she be peaceful, May he/she be healthy....)

(Salzberg, 2017)

Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

- How do you feel now?

## Achieving Happiness

In his book, *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman (2002) describes the components contributing to happiness. One of these components is completely under your control!

- We can increase our levels of happiness: **H = S + C + V**
- **H** = Happiness (enduring)
- **S** = Set Range, based on your biological parents
- **C** = Circumstances of your life (health, money, relationships, job, religion, etc.)
- **V** = Voluntary Control, factors that are under your control (dealing with the past, thinking about the future, etc.)

$$\text{H(appiness)} = \text{S(et range)} + \text{C(ircumstances)} + \text{V(oluntary) Control}$$

(Seligman, 2002)



# Module 6: Mindful Happiness

## Control of Happiness

How do you contribute to your own feelings of happiness? Here are some things that can help you with that “Voluntary Control” component of happiness:

- Maintaining positive emotions
- Targeting optimism
- Promoting health and longevity
- Dealing more effectively with adversity and pain
- Being grateful

**Here are five people for whom I am grateful right now:**



**Here are five things for which I am grateful right now:**



# Module 6: Mindful Happiness

## Dealing with *The Past*

- REACH for forgiveness
- Forgive yourself
- Forgive others

## Thinking about *The Future*

**Promote Optimism** (greater control, less stress)

- Negative events are temporary/specific
- Will get better

**Decrease Pessimism** (less control, more stress)

- Negative events are the worst/permanent/personalized
- Will not get better
- To maintain optimism.... **Utilize the A, B, C, D, E Reframing Method (see pages 12-13)!**

## Living in *The Present*

In order to avoid the potential for depression from living in the past and avoid the potential for anxiety from thinking too much about the future, focus on now!

- **Seek gratifications:** Seek activities that engage us fully, highlight our strengths, and provide long-lasting fulfillment or pride

**Which activities are fulfilling for you?**



# Module 6: Mindful Happiness

**Which activities can be removed from your life?**



**Avoid habituation:** Bring many pleasures and spread out, rather than indulging all at once

**Example:** Stop after three spoonfuls of ice cream rather than the whole bowl (the next spoonfuls have little value to us).

**Here is one pleasure I can spread out:**



- Savor: slow down our actions and truly enjoy what we are doing
- Unitask!!!

**Here is one activity where I can try unitasking:**



**Be Mindful: Slow down the mind and be attentive to the present**

Did you know.... Research shows significant benefits when mindfulness is practiced twice a day for 20 minutes each!



# Module 6: Mindful Thoughts

## Day 1

*"All of life is miracle."* — Thich Nhat Hanh

Enjoy the miracle that is life through your breathing exercises. Think about the miracles of yourself and one other person and pray or put positive thoughts for both of you into the universe.

## Day 2

*"The most important decision you make is to be in a good mood."* — Voltaire

Start today and each day with a half-smile and try to maintain it throughout the day. Think about what wonderful things are going to happen today.

## Day 3

*"When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us."* — Helen Keller

Think about something that stands in the way of your happiness today. Are there opportunities that arise from this situation? What positive pieces can you take from it?

## Day 4

*"No matter what the situation, remind yourself, 'I have choice.'"* — Deepak Chopra

As you move through the day, remind yourself that you can choose to be happy. Tell yourself of that choice throughout the day.

## Day 5

*"Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it."*  
—William Arthur Ward

Say thank you to everyone for everything they do for you today.

## Day 6

*"Gratitude doesn't change the scenery. It merely washes clean the glass you look through so you can clearly see the colors."* — Richelle E. Goodrich

Begin today by journaling five people or things for which you are grateful. Even if your list is the same every day, ask yourself how you feel after writing it?

# Module 7: Mindful Advocacy

## 5-Minute Breathing Exercise: Choice

Start with your half-smile. Focus on your breath (counting slowly as you inhale and exhale). Feel your belly rise as you inhale and your lungs empty as you exhale. Remember that reality is in the present moment, where you are and who you are right now.

Choose from one of the mindfulness breathing techniques you have learned:

1. Focus on breathing (let thoughts flow in and out)
2. Visualization (image of a pebble or other calm scene)
3. Sensory grounding (focus on one sense at a time)
4. Body scan (relax your body from head to toe)
5. Loving kindness (think about yourself and then another with good outcomes)

Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

- Did you feel like this was five minutes?
- How do you feel now?

## Empowering You

Before you think about advocating on behalf of someone else, you need to empower yourself. Here are a couple of techniques:

**Power Names:** Add an empowering adjective before your name. For example, you might think of yourself as Powerful Paula or Mighty Mike. Use your Power Name when you self-talk. Here is my Power Name:

# Module 7: Mindful Advocacy

**Power Poses:** Power poses can make you feel like a superhero. Do your power poses prior to an important meeting. Let's practice a few:



## From Conflict to Collaboration

Once you feel confident in your own abilities to advocate, you will want to prepare for effective collaboration. First, let's explore the difference between conflict and collaboration.

- What is conflict, from your perspective?
- How do you feel you experience conflict that is specific to your role as caregiver?
  - With physicians
  - With family
  - With schools
  - With community
- What is collaboration?
- Is trust a major factor in collaboration?

# Module 7: Mindful Advocacy

## Toward Effective Collaboration

In his book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (1989) cautions that we must have mastery over ourselves before we can be successful with others. Here is his model of the seven habits:

### **First:** Mastery over ourselves

1. Being proactive
2. Beginning with the end in mind
3. Putting first things first

### **Then:** Success with others

4. Thinking win-win
5. Seeking first to understand, then to be understood
6. Synergizing (creatively problem solving together with others who may have different viewpoints)

Most important: 7. Sharpening the saw (taking care of ourselves)!

## Knowing Our Needs

In order to be proactive, begin with the end in mind, and put first things first, we must know ourselves and our children.... What do we really need, and therefore, want from others?

- Family – (e.g., Understanding)
- Religious Leaders – (e.g., inclusion)
- Physicians – (e.g., empathy and guidance)
- Schools – (e.g., appropriate education/services)
- Community – (e.g., kindness, approval, being open and welcoming)

# Module 7: Mindful Advocacy

## Mastering Our Mindset

Once we have built some self-confidence, and we have identified what we need from our various partners and supporters, we need to make sure that we are in a good mental space to advocate for our needs and those of our children.

As you prepare for an important phone call or meeting, you will want to use some strategies you already know for mindfulness and relaxation and for gratitude and forgiveness:

- **Meditation or relaxation techniques:** Achieve our calm and clear our minds
- **Gratitude and forgiveness practice:** Lessen anger and frustration — and see the good in others, which can make them more receptive to us and our children's needs.

Then you will want to focus your advocacy efforts to the “Big Rocks.” Imagine that you have a jar and some big rocks, some small rocks, some gravel, and some sand. If you fill the jar with sand first, the gravel and larger rocks will not fit. However, if you put the big rocks in first, then the small rocks, gravel, and sand, the smaller particles will fit around the big rocks, and you will be able to fit much more in the jar.



Here are my “Big Rocks” (priorities for advocacy):

Now here are my “Big Rocks” labeled A, B, C, D, etc. in order of priority:

A.

B.

C.

D.

# Module 7: Mindful Thoughts

## Day 1

*“Promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.”*

— Christian D. Larson

Use your positive self-talk today and try some power poses. Focus on your physical and mental strength as you do your breathing exercises.

## Day 2

*“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”* — Eleanor Roosevelt

Practice the strategies of QTIP (Quit Taking It Personally) and STOP (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed) whenever you are interacting with another person today.

## Day 3

*“To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.”* — Confucius

Think about what you need to improve in order to make changes in others and in situations where you may have influence. Set an intention for one improvement that can be a focus for today.

## Day 4

*“You may hurl at them all the logic of a Plato or Immanuel Kant, but you will not alter their opinions.”*  
— Dale Carnegie

In your interactions with people today, strive to find solutions rather than change opinions. How can you get a “win-win” during a collaboration today?

## Day 5

*When you can't change the direction of the wind – adjust your sails.”*

— H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Think about some alternate pathways — some Plan Bs — that might work for you if your preferred path is interrupted. Journal these ideas.

## Day 6

*“Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.”*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Remember the “big rocks” — the priorities — in your life. Look at how you are spending your time. Does what you are doing today reflect what is important to you? If not, what changes can you make?

# Module 8: Mindful Collaboration

## 5-Minute Breathing Exercise: Choice

Start with your half-smile. Focus on your breath (counting slowly as you inhale and exhale). Feel your belly rise as you inhale and your lungs empty as you exhale. Remember that reality is in the present moment, where you are and who you are right now.

Choose from one of the mindfulness breathing techniques you have learned:

Focus on breathing (let thoughts flow in and out)  
Visualization (image of a pebble or other calm scene)  
Sensory grounding (focus on one sense at a time)  
Body scan (relax your body from head to toe)  
Loving kindness (think about yourself and then another with good outcomes)

Take a moment to think about the breathing exercise you just completed.

- Which is most effective for you?
- How do you feel now?
- When and where will you do your breathing exercises each day?

## “Getting to Yes” – Collaboration Framework

You are practicing mindfulness and trying to have a calm and empowered mindset. You have also prepared for your advocacy phone call or meeting by determining your needs and priorities. Now we will examine how to most effectively collaborate in order to get what you need.

In what is known as *The Harvard Negotiation Project* (2011), Roger Fischer and William Ury describe “principled negotiation” in “Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving in.” The four pillars — People, Interests, Options, and Criteria — are described below:

### Four Pillars (Fischer and Ury, 2011):

- **People:** Separate the Problem from the Person
- **Interests:** Focus on mutual interests rather than different positions
- **Options:** Invent multiple options (be creative!)
- **Criteria:** Use objective standards/facts



# Module 8: Mindful Collaboration

## “Getting to Yes” - People

You have already learned some ways to master your mindset, which is especially crucial whenever you are interacting with people. Here are two more strategies that can help while you are in the middle of an important phone call or meeting:

### QTIP



- Quit Taking It Personally!
- Bring a Q-Tip with you to important meetings to remind you of this mindset.

### STOP

- Stop; Take a breath; Observe; Proceed
- Do this in stressful situations (i.e., during important meetings) or throughout the day to remind you to build awareness.
- Bring a picture of a stop sign as a visual reminder of this mindset!



## Other strategies

Since advocacy and collaboration can come in many forms, here are a few more strategies:

- **Phone calls:** Consider letting the phone ring three times before answering.
- **Emails:** Consider writing an email, stopping to pause and breath, rereading the email, and then sending.
- **Meetings:** Consider engaging in breathing exercises/mindfulness just prior to an important meeting. This can also help while you are in the middle of an important phone call or meeting.

# Module 8: Mindful Collaboration

## “Getting to Yes” — Interests

As you are trying to collaborate with people, always keep in mind the shared interests between the parties and seek ways that differing interests can be brought together. Think about the following questions:

- Do you have the same goal(s)?
- Do you care for the same person(s)?
- Do you have the same timeline(s)?
- Do you have the same resources and/or limitations?
- What else could be a mutual interest?

## “Getting to Yes” - Options

Using Covey’s (1989) sentiment of “Think Win-Win,” how can both parties gain from an agreement?

- Brainstorm options together
- Are there any other options?
- Use creativity in broadening the types of options
- Think “outside the box”

Bernard Roth (2015), in speaking of “design thinking” in his book, *The Achievement Habit*, makes these suggestions in order to focus on the “real problem”:

- Making lists
- Creating idea logs
- Incorporating humor
- Asking “what if” questions
- And other techniques to “get unstuck” (pp. 82-83)

# Module 8: Mindful Collaboration

## “Getting to Yes” — Criteria

In order to work toward collaboration rather than conflict, common ground needs to be established. Is there an independent standard that can be used — one that is not dependent on either party and is also practical to use?

- Try to agree on an objective standard rather than disagree on positions.
- Example: What will constitute educational progress for my child? How will this be measured?
- If there are different standards and procedures proposed, consider these openly and try and find common ground.
- Are there procedures that both parties can agree upon to resolve a conflict should one arise?

## “Getting to Yes” – Practical Ideas

- What can you say yes to?
- Gain some good will from others
- After agreeing, lay out your points
- Show the facts
- Avoid saying “you are wrong”
- Listening with intent to the other person
- Learn from this [video on “Deep Listening”](#) (Thich Nhat Hahn, 2020):



# Module 8: Mindful Collaboration

## Your Turn

Think about these four pillars in relation to a phone call or meeting where you will have to advocate for your needs or the needs of your family member.

- Can you identify an area where you are experiencing conflict?
- Does your mindset affect this situation?

### People:

Can you advocate by being hard on the problem but soft on the person? What are your strategies?

### Interests:

Is it possible for your interests and the interests of the other party to both be recognized? What are your common interests?

### Options:

What can you say “yes” to in order to build good will? Can you offer creative solutions?

### Criteria:

What are the objective standards that can be used?

# Summary

## Starting Tomorrow

To reduce the stress you feel, here are some things you can do right away:

- Begin each day with a half-smile (and catch yourself all day long)
- Practice stress management strategies
- Practice breathing exercises for at least 5 minutes a day
- Start journaling your experiences
- List people and things for which you are grateful each day for at least two weeks and see if you have improved feelings of joy and happiness
- Try to change negative beliefs
- Plan “Me Time”: A day/time to give yourself a reward (e.g., a facial, time for reading or to watch a sunrise, hot chocolate)



## Strategies for you

1. Circle of Concern/Circle of Influence
2. Stress Ranking Scale
3. Reframing
4. Mindful attitudes
5. Mindfulness/Body Scan
6. Breathing
7. Journaling
8. Mindfulness/Sensory Grounding
9. Mindfulness/Awareness building
10. Optimism
11. “I Can” thoughts (and positive self-talk)
12. Having/Keeping Hope
13. Scheduling “Me” Time/Rewards
14. Recording gratefulness
15. REACHing for Forgiveness
16. Seeking gratifications/fully engaging activities
17. Avoiding habituation/Indulging all at once
18. Savoring/slowing down
19. Mindfulness/loving kindness
20. Power poses
21. Focusing on the big rocks
22. Q-Tip: Quit Taking It Personally!
23. STOP: Stop; Take a breath; Observe; Proceed
24. Collaborating using The Four Pillars (People, Interests, Options, Criteria)
25. Deep listening
26. Keeping in touch with my Proactive Caring Friends
27. Mindful movement (e.g., yoga, tai chi, or qigong)
28. Beginning again!

# Additional Resources

## Access ProActive Caring Online

Access additional resources related to mindfulness on the ProActive Caring website: [www.proactivecaring.org](http://www.proactivecaring.org). These include:

- Meditations - videos created by Elisa Gwilliam that offer an opportunity for class participants to engage in and practice guided meditation. Each video lasts 8-12 minutes.
- Mindful Minutes – short (one-minute) videos created by Elisa Gwilliam that correspond to the “Mindful Thoughts” in the ProActive Caring e-Manual.
- Videos about Mindful Movement practices (such as walking meditation, yoga, tai chi, and qigong) that you may wish to add to your routine.
- Discussions of stress reduction strategies that parents may employ in interactions with school personnel.

. . . and much more!



## Continue to Develop Your Mindfulness Practice Over Time

Mindfulness is a practice that has been shown to make changes in your body that help you reduce stress.

- Remember that knowing strategies is just the beginning — keep practicing!
- Try other/new strategies and learn more! Consider adding Mindful Movement such as Walking meditation, yoga, tai chi, and qigong to your routine.
- See the ProActive Caring website for videos about Mindful Movement practices.
- Remember you are not alone. Share your story with others on the same journey, or join ProActive Caring’s private Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/326147471208398/> (tto be a hyperlink without the url)
- Try setting aside a Mindfulness day.
- Remember that you can always begin again. . . .

# Acknowledgements

ProActive Caring is inspired by the family caregivers who are forever present for their loved ones.



## ***Teaching Mindfulness to Support Family Members of Persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities***

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Lastly, the ProActive Caring team would like to thank YOU for downloading the ProActive Caring e-Manual and participating in the program. We wish you the best as you undertake a Mindfulness practice and take your first steps to a greater sense of well-being and better health!

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The ProActive Caring Program, a project of The Center on Aging and Disability Policy, at Mount Saint Mary College, aims to teach effective coping mechanisms for short- and long-term stressful situations. The project is funded by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council in order to provide family caregivers of individuals with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities in New York State with expanded training and support.