I want to admit something. I just returned from seeing *A Bad Moms Christmas* (Todd, Lucas, & Scott, 2017) at the movie theater, and I laughed out loud because I identified with a lot of it. Not that I am a mom, or have a “bad” mom, but because the movie highlights the stressors I have experienced during holidays in years gone by. In particular, the responsibilities that women take on (or are given) to make the fast-paced holiday season perfect for everyone around them, or how the stress of the holidays, ironically, can bring out the worst in families. I get so caught up in the hype of the holidays that I sometimes forget what matters most—authentic connections with family and friends.

So, this year I have made a commitment to “lean in” this holiday season from a slightly different perspective—to slow down and be more fully present so that I can better connect with family, friends, and colleagues. This is not the first time that I have written about slowing down (Buettner, Shattell, & Reber, 2011; Shattell, 2010, 2017), and perhaps the elusiveness and temporality of this particular mode of being keeps me thinking and writing about it. And it might be why Angela Johnson’s work, which focuses on the art and science of how to be fully present using mindfulness, is so appealing, and which is why I invited her to coauthor this editorial. Together, in this editorial, we propose strategies to slow down to better care for ourselves and, in the process of doing so, to create and strengthen authentic connections with individuals in our personal and professional lives.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT**

It is certainly beyond the scope of this editorial to review all the social support literature over the past several decades, but it is generally accepted that human connectedness has a positive impact on mental and physical health (Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Thoits, 2011). Social support improves the ability to cope with stress (Milner, Knjzakhi, Butterworth, & LaMontagne, 2016), buffers the effects of occupational stress on sleep quality (Pow, King, Stephen- son, & DeLongis, 2017), and improves mood, well-being, and life satisfaction (Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi, & Stein, 2013).

Although human beings crave and benefit from connections with others, loneliness is considered a major public health threat, as approximately 43 million individuals admit to feeling chronically lonely (Anderson, 2010). People experiencing loneliness are not only at greater risk of cardiac heart disease and stroke (Valtorta, Kanaan, Gilbody, Ronzi, & Hanratty, 2016), but premature death (Holt-Lunstad, 2017). Human connectedness is especially important for older adults who should be encouraged to enrich and grow their social networks (Dinkins, 2017). As nurses, this holds true for us as well. Nurses and other health care providers need to focus on attaining, retaining, and growing our social support systems. We need to pay attention to the impact of positive social support and human connectedness, to not only better handle the stressors of the holiday season, but the stressors of the workplace.

**MINDFULNESS AND ITS PRACTICES**

To feel less stressed and more connected this holiday season, we suggest trying three mindfulness practices. Here is a little bit about what mindfulness means, how it can be practiced, and what it may do for you.

More likely than not, you have heard the word “mindfulness.” Mindfulness is an evidence-based meditation practice that helps individuals learn how to return to the present and be with what is happening, moment-to-moment, with a sense of curiosity, kindness, and compassion (PrincePaul & Kelley, 2017).

Why is being present important? Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) reported that we spend approximately one half of our waking hours in an automatic state of mind wandering—where we are caught up in the regrets of the past or worries about the future. The problem is that our own thoughts, which are often negative, as well as our automatic stressful reactions to them, get in the way of us fully participating in life as it is happening in the here and now. Despite the brain’s hardwiring to wander off, the good news is we can train the brain to help us be more present (Xu, Purdon, Seli, & Smilek, 2017)—which is, when you stop to think about it, when life really happens. When we are more present, we might find that we can connect and engage with ourselves, family, friends, and colleagues in ways that are healthy and enjoyable.

Despite the potential chaos and busy days this holiday season may bring, consider these three simple mindful-
Mindful Breathing

The holidays provide ample opportunities for us to gather with others to celebrate. Although most time with others can be enjoyable, there may be those moments when you find yourself annoyed by certain people or situations. Instead of getting worked up and stressed out, you might consider trying mindful breathing. Regardless of where you are, or who you are with, mindful breathing is an easy practice that simply involves becoming aware of the sensations of your breath. Unlike other breathing practices, mindful breathing is not about changing the breath in any way (i.e., extending your exhalation and/or pausing between breaths), but rather noticing the sensations of the breath—one breath at a time. Try it: Allow your spine to be straight, but not too tight or tense; soften your belly; notice your feet on the floor; and focus your attention on the breath. As you breathe, you might notice the coolness of the air at your nostrils upon inhalation, the warmth of the air upon exhalation. You might also notice the sensations of the chest and/or belly rising and falling with each breath in and out. To maintain your attention on the breath, it might be helpful to silently repeat “in” and “out” during this practice. The moment you notice your mind wandering off to your annoyances, extend a little compassion to yourself for feeling this way, silently say “wandering,” and return your attention back to the breath. Again, do this for as long as you are comfortable. Studies suggest mindful breathing can enhance attention to one’s performance (Bing, Canar, Pizzuto, & Compton, 2016), reduce mind wandering (Hafenbrack, Kinias, & Barsade, 2014), and increase positive thinking (Cho, Ryu, Noh, & Lee, 2016).

Mindful Reflection

One way to experience greater joy, happiness, and connection this holiday season is to notice the “good things” that are happening in life. Given the hardwired nature of the brain to scan for the negative (Ho, Sun, Ting, Chan, & Lee, 2015), you might initially find this practice easiest to do at the end of the day. Each night, dedicate a few moments to mindfully reflect on your day, and write down three good things that occurred. For example, from the simple and sweet memory of a complete stranger who warmly smiled while holding the door open for you, to the holiday card you received from a new friend—scan your day for anything that may have warmed your heart and soul. To enhance the health effects of this practice, stop, pause, and savor the memory of the experiences you have brought to mind. If you get into this habit, you might find in a few days that you are mindful of the “good things” happening in real time. Try it and see for yourself. This type of practice may increase happiness, as well as reduce depressive symptoms (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Mindfulness practices are good for the mind and body (van der Zwan, de Vente, Huizink, Bögels, & de Bruin, 2015). Although the exact mechanisms of mindfulness are not yet fully known, the benefits seem to run far and wide. Across a wide variety of populations, including nurses (Guillaumie, Boiral, & Champagne, 2017), there is evidence that mindfulness eases anxiety, depression (Bajaj, Robins, & Pande, 2016), and pain (Zeidan & Vago, 2016); boosts resilience to stress (Hwang et al., 2017); and cultivates greater compassion (Fernando, Skinner, & Consedine, 2017), attention (Fountain-Zaragoza & Prakash, 2017), and connection (Adair, Fredrickson, Castro-Schilo, Kim, & Sidberry, 2017) with others.

As the saying goes, there is no time like the present. Have a joyful holiday season, and have fun using these simple techniques to begin your journey to greater mindfulness. 

One way to experience greater joy, happiness, and connection this holiday season is to notice the “good things” that are happening in life.
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mindfulness practices. May you experience less stress and connect more deeply with those you care about.

REFERENCES


