

Just Be Here, And Remember to Breathe

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It can seem like a cliché, but there is truth in it. When life gets overwhelming – just breathe and pay attention to this moment.



Last Wednesday morning, my kid had a runny nose. No fever, no signs of anything else, just a runny nose. But after school, there were body aches, and by 5 pm, a fever of 103.

Younger sibling wasn't far behind. About 12 hours later, another fever was climbing. And every mom knows that if one sick kid is tough, even harder to manage is having two clingy, tired, sick little ones, who both want all of your attention and all of your lap.

And, of course, the even tougher thing is managing two clingy, tired, sick little ones, who both want all of your attention and all of your lap, once you are sick too.

Once the sinus infection set in and the headache hit, I was, of course feeling exhausted and overwhelmed and generally cranky and irritated. Then my mom started feeling sick, too, which has a major impact since grandma lives with us and is my only source of child care.

Every mom has had that moment. When you go to the bathroom to pee and end up sitting down on the floor, crying, because you're tired and worn out, and can't comprehend how you will get through. When

you have that moment where you say, either to yourself or to a higher power, depending on your belief system, “I don’t think I can do this.”

But you know what’s amazing?

You can.

You have.

And you will.

Grief, fear, exhaustion – they are all normal parts of the human experience, normal parts of the mom experience. Our society has a perpetual need for shiny, happy people. Social media doesn’t help. We live with FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) as we watch the perfectly edited virtual versions of our friend’s lives. It’s easy to forget that, for the most part, people are posting the highs they are proud of and keeping the lows to themselves. And that’s a shame, because while we need our friends to support us when we feel high, we need our loved ones to comfort us when we feel low, too. Yes, it leaves you vulnerable to share when you’re scared, hurt or overwhelmed, but vulnerability helps you open up to love and grace and the compassion and kindness of others.

Grief, fear, exhaustion – like the ocean, they come in waves. You will get through. You can get through. Sit on the floor. Let the tears come. Let yourself sob. Let the wave pass through your body. It will pass. Don’t rush it, don’t force. Let it move, like a wave, in its own time, its own rhythm. Let yourself be in the moment.

The practice of mindfulness is about truly being in the moment – where you are, experiencing what you are experiencing. It’s not about controlling your mind. Meditation is not about trying to make yourself a calmer, happier person. It’s about being who you are, and accepting what you are feeling RIGHT NOW. And that includes grief, sadness, and fear. So when you’re overwhelmed and you need to sit down and cry – just sit down and cry. Be with your tears. Don’t let your mind swirl out in the future with fears about what you have to do. Don’t let your mind swirl in self-judgement with guilt about what you should do, could do, ought to be doing. Just be here, now. Now, you are sad. Now, you are feeling overwhelmed. Right now, you need to cry. And that’s okay. You are here, in this moment. Experience your body, your most concrete anchor to center you in this moment.

Keep that present moment awareness – and pay attention to how the wave starts to subside. How your breath begins to settle and your chest begins to relax. Keep your present moment focused on your body – feel how your breath begins to come a little slower, a little softer. Feel how the muscles of your back and neck and shoulders begin to relax. Feel how the muscles of your face soften, how your nose and eyes release their tension. Focus on your breath, the sensation of it coming in and out. Feel how your lungs expand as you inhale and contract as you exhale. Feel how, with each exhalation, you can physically experience a little more of the fear and stress and pain and worry literally leaving your body. It has become a cliché for a reason – taking the time to breathe can help you work through stress better than anything else. It centers you, it calms you, it brings you back to the one essential thing, which is to breathe in and out.

Don’t rush yourself. Take some time to just sit with your breath. Don’t think about what you have to do next, or what you just did, or what else is on your to-do list. You just have to breathe.

Once you're ready to get up and move, do the minimum necessary between the moment you are in and getting yourself to bed. Skip the dishes and the laundry, give the kids a quicker bath and brush their teeth in the tub. Get yourself to bed. Get some sleep. It's another cliché for a reason. Everything looks better after a good night's sleep. Your grandmother swore by it and neurologists have proven it – when we are tired, we are more reactive and more emotional. When we are fatigued, we have less self-control. After a good night's sleep, your reserves are restored, and you are better able to do what you have to do.

You can do it. You have done it before. And you will do it again. But for a moment – when the world feels overwhelming and you're not sure you can keep doing it – just stop. Just breathe. Just be here, now. And then when you're ready – once you've let the tears cycle through and gotten a good night's sleep, you'll know you can do it all again.



Kimberlee Bethany Bonura, PhD, is #TheFitEnoughMom. Dr. Bonura is an exercise scientist, an Experienced-Registered Yoga Teacher with the Yoga Alliance, a certified personal trainer, and a certified group fitness instructor, and a working mom of two. Her mission is to help everyone realize that fitness can be fun and accessible – no stress, no guilt, and definitely no pain!