

Parenting, Fatigue and Mindfulness – A Journey

“There is no tired like the tired you experience when you are a parent”

As a psychotherapist I often hear about the lack of sleep mothers get and how the impact of this has a way of infiltrating almost every other aspect of their lives. When I had my son I realised exactly what these mothers were talking about when they would say “there is no tired like the tired you experience when you are a mother”. This kind of tired, as I have come to realise, is not only physical, but mental, emotional and affects the spirit as well, because you are giving of yourself so completely each and every day.

It was a long weekend and I was exhausted, the type of tired where you can't remember how to speak and you are staring blearily at the TV, not really taking anything in. I desperately wanted a 'catch up' morning.

Why is it so often that when we have these intentions our wonderful babes don't seem to play by the planned rules? On my 'sleep-in Sunday' I awoke for the 3am feed, I arose again at 6am hoping to crawl back into bed but my son was restless and did not want to be put down. I nursed him, I rocked him, I walked him, I soothed him, silently urging him to sleep. All the while he maintained that half-wake half-sleep limbo state, where I couldn't leave him and he was not sure either whether he wanted to be awake or asleep.

After some time and not a lot of success, I felt myself tensing and tightening, thoughts began creeping into my mind, unfair resentments that this little being was preventing me from obtaining much needed sleep, preventing me from making ground against the formidable foe that is a mother's fatigue. Finally, I had to relent; I could not do this on my own. I woke my husband and asked if he would have a turn settling our son. He obliged.

I crawled back into bed; shut my eyes; waiting for the comfort of restful sleep – but it continued to elude me. Instead feelings of disappointment with myself began to echo. “I was not able to maintain my patience” “I couldn't settle my son” “I am not a good mother”. Then the insidious feelings of guilt began creeping through, these feelings that are a mother's bane. I felt guilt that I had thoughts of resentment towards my son, I was not open to him, not present and certainly not feeling a great amount of love.

Mindful awareness is a tool that allows us to view our emotions, however at first, it can seem like a cruel trick because as you become more mindful, observing your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations, you become more aware of those times when your thoughts and emotions are less than ideal. You realise that you are fallible and with that realisation, your thoughts, if left unchecked, can lead you down a path of self-deprecation. Beating yourself up for being less than this 'ideal' that you aspire to live up to. Luckily mindfulness also offers tools to move beyond suffering, imperfection and the disappointment that we so often fall short of our expectations about how we believe we should be.

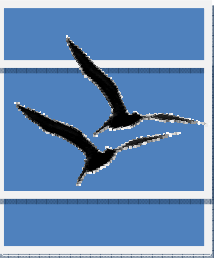
One of the core attitudes of mindfulness is non-judgement. Mindfulness teaches us how to accept these thoughts and emotions. To observe their presence and importantly, how to dissolve the need to label them as good or bad, or the need to change, fix or get rid of them.

I remembered the tools I had learnt and simply allowed the thoughts and emotions to be, resisting the urge to block, distract, or push them away. Instead, turning my attention towards these thoughts and feelings and slowly opening to them in a kinder and more gentle way.

I sought to see what unhelpful thoughts and emotions I was holding on to and to simply allow them to be present, without judgment. In this case, my attachment to the need for a sleep-in was causing me distress. My perception about how my reality in that moment 'should be' was not matching how my 'actual reality' was playing out. This discrepancy was causing me to feel frustrated and resentful.

Mindfulness Centre

Living, breathing and achieving with enjoyment



Mindfulness teaches us to see and adapt our agenda. To move beyond our beliefs about how things 'should be', to be relieved of the constant struggle to 'do it the right way' and to be free to take up what the present offers in reality. Motherhood is a constant lesson in opening, acceptance and adaptation. In learning these skills, those moments of self criticism, resentment and emotional struggle can be transformed.

So at 6:30am I suggested my husband bring our son into our bed. And with mindful awareness I let go of my agenda, I let go of the desire for the sweet caress of slumber to envelope me. I kissed my son, pulled myself out of bed, went downstairs and made myself a cup of tea, a jam croissant and brought them back to bed with me. Even though my son had already had a bit of a feed earlier, I offered him more. He attached, had a few sucks and drifted off to sleep easily.

Time and again, I am reminded how, if we allow it, parenting can echo the most profound spiritual practice. Parenting offers us opportunities each and every day to look inwards to observe the most inner workings of our minds and emotions and to free ourselves from the hold of the agenda-driven ego, so that we may find a space (however small and fleeting at times) in which a different kind of awareness emerges, an awareness borne of clarity and wisdom, from which to take considered action. It is from this space that we can find a greater sense of loving kindness towards ourselves, our children and partners, building more positive and enriching relationships.

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