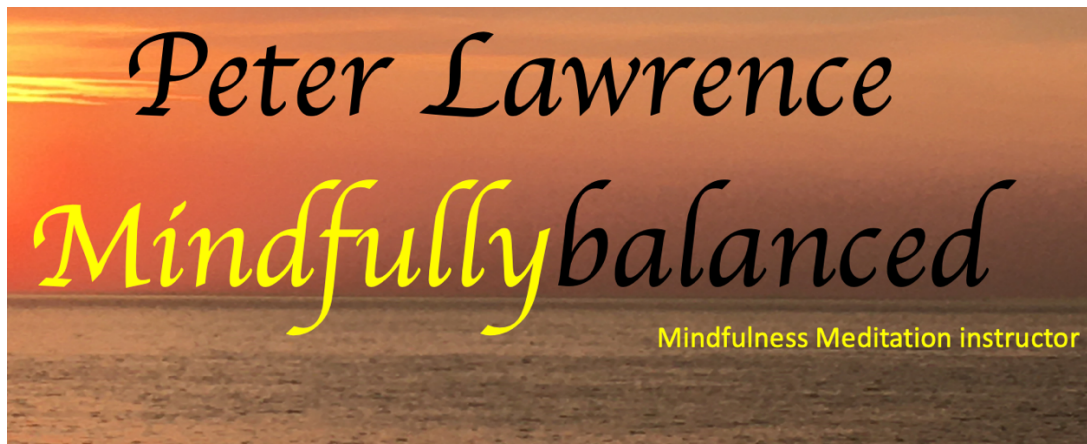


Newsletter 27/2021



Mindfullybalanced.co.uk

Date: 5th September 2021

Contents of this newsletter:

Section 1: **Update weekly sessions:**

Monday 6th September – Sunday 12th September

Section 2: **How to manage anxiety with mindfulness:** - particularly the anxiety and mixed feelings that many of us are experiencing as we begin to enter back into our pre-lockdown routines, going out and being around crowds plus other situations.

Louise Hankinson - a Breathworks Teacher and Clinical Psychologist

Monday 6th September – 9am **and 7.30pm**
(please note change of time for the Monday evening.

Wednesday 8th September - 9am

Thursday 9th September – 6.30pm

Friday 10th September – 9am and 11.30am

Weekend times:

Saturday 11th September 11am

Sunday 12th September – no session.

I did think the Sunday sessions would start on the 12th, but I have to put the sessions back to October. More info will follow.

Advance notice:

Starting of the Mindfully Based Stressed Reduction (MBSR) course will start on Monday 7th September at 7.30pm.



Newsletter 27/2021

I start the 9 week Mindfulness Based stressed Reduction (MBSR) course on the Monday 7.30pm session, with the first session being an introduction. This course will follow the curriculum meditations of the course with added material being my own authenticity to mindfulness.

If you want the Zoom code for any of the session(s) you would like to attend, please contact me through my website's 'contact page'.

Section 2:

How to manage anxiety with mindfulness:

Breathworks Teacher and Clinical Psychologist Louise shares tips for managing anxiety with mindfulness - particularly the anxiety and mixed feelings that many of us are experiencing as we begin to enter back into our pre-lockdown routines, going out, being around crowds, and other situations.

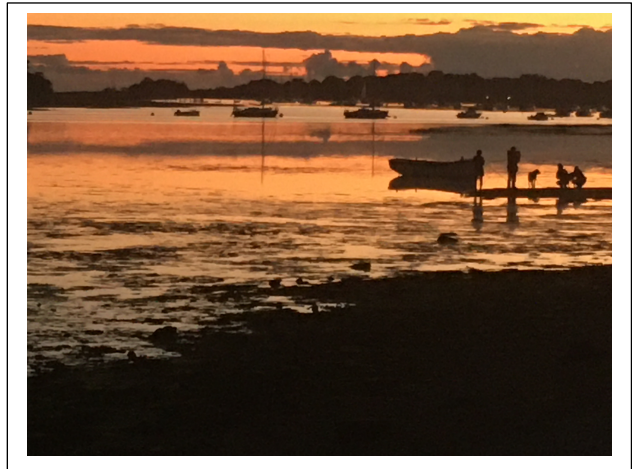
If you've been doing something one way for a year, it's going to feel really strange when you do something different. That's normal.

Try folding your arms the way you normally do, and then switch it to do it the other way. How does it feel? Going out used to feel normal. It will again.

Take it gently, and don't do anything you don't feel ready to do or feel pressured to do. Take small steps, in a very graded way. Start by going somewhere away from crowds, outdoors, at a quiet time of day. Choose somewhere that means something to you – somewhere you have nice memories, or can really connect with nature, or something you enjoy.

In general, those going out again after lockdown have not found it as bad or stressful as they thought it would be. Our minds are very good at predicting disaster, and they will have gotten even better at this over the past 12 months. This is our minds trying to keep us safe. They need new information. If you go out and it's OK, they will start to update.

Shutting yourself away from covid has also meant shutting yourself away from things that nourish and feed you – friends, work, nature, sport, shops etc. It may have helped you to feel safe and less anxious but cut you off from sources of wellbeing at the same time. Going out will help you to start to gradually connect with the people and things that matter to you – AND you may feel an increase in anxiety. An increase in the pleasant feelings, AND an increase in the unpleasant feelings. This is life.



Newsletter 27/2021

Mindfulness can help you to be more open to the unpleasant stuff, and more aware of the pleasant without wanting to cling to it and hold on to it, and in being more open and aware, we can make wiser choices about what action to take, moment by moment.

Focusing on Our 'Why'

Focusing on what going out will help you to reconnect with can be important. The WHY. There's a lovely questionnaire called the **Valued Living Questionnaire**, which just allows you to take a step back and think about what matters to you, across a number of different life domains. Where you notice gaps between where you are and where you'd like to be, you can set yourself small goals to close those gaps. Whilst it can be painful to see the gaps, it can be hugely motivating, and may be the encouragement you need to take those small steps back out into the world.



We sometimes talk about 'willingness' when we are looking at how to manage anxiety. Very often, people talk about wanting to get rid of anxiety, or control it. Indeed, there are strategies that can allow us to calm our anxious minds and bodies, such as breathing exercises. However, the most helpful thing we can do is try to let go of our struggle with these natural changes in the body that we call anxiety. It's likely that in doing so, it will move

on. In order to be 'willing' to have our anxiety, we need a really good reason. That's why spending time reminding ourselves of who and what matters, can help us if we're going to open up to difficult feelings. Values give us the reason – the WHY.

Managing an Ever-Present Threat

Anxiety is felt in the body, and shows up when we are in the presence of something that feels threatening. We're programmed to take notice and take action. Covid is tricky as it's invisible. Our brains and bodies are designed to deal with short-term, physical threats rather than ongoing or invisible threats. And even when the danger isn't present, our own thoughts and worries can remind us of it. This means we spend too much time with our 'threat systems' active. This imbalance leads to stress and distress.

We need to find ways to move out of the threat system – find strategies to calm the mind and the body, and cultivate our soothing system. Spend some time on activities that make us feel contented, safe, or cared for. Mindfulness can help with this.

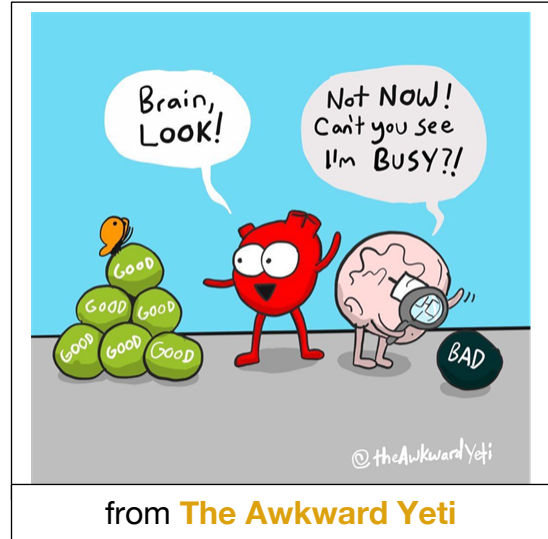
Quick tips to manage anxiety:

- Blow some bubbles – breathing through pursed lips, stimulates the body's 'rest and digest' setting (the parasympathetic nervous system), which counters the 'fight or flight' response (sympathetic nervous system).
- Breathe out for longer than you breathe in. Do this for a minute.

Newsletter 27/2021

- Hug yourself – touch is very powerful, and it's something we have perhaps been missing during the past year. We can stimulate the body in the same way by hugging ourselves. The body will respond by releasing oxytocin, which is the body's natural opiate – and will leave you feeling warm and safe. Put one hand under the opposite arm (in the armpit) and the other across to hold the opposite upper arm, close your eyes and just breathe.
- Humming – stimulates the vagus nerve, which passes by the voice box/vocal chords. Humming slows down the out-breath as well (see above).
- Drop the anchor – simple grounding exercises such as 'notice 5 things' (5 things you can see, hear, touch/feel) can be helpful, as we come out of our mental experiencing, into our 5 senses experiencing. This gives our thinking minds a break, and broadens out our field of awareness.
- Stroke your pet. (if you have one or a cuddly toy).
- Stop trying to get rid of anxiety! Drop the struggle. We tend to want to get rid of anxiety. It can feel unpleasant, and there's a natural tendency to want to move away from it. In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, there's a metaphor called 'The Struggle Switch' or 'Struggle Dial'. Rather than turning up the 'struggle dial' as we try to turn down our 'anxiety dial', try instead to turn down the struggle dial. We can notice 'struggle' in our breathing, our posture, tension in our bodies, and in our behaviour. Learning to regulate our breathing and soften tension and hard edges in the body, turns down the struggle, in order that we can make room for our anxiety, allowing us to move more freely towards things that matter to us.
- **Taking in the Good** (Rick Hanson) is a wonderful practice, to help you to counter the brain's natural negativity bias. Doing this practice for a few weeks can give you a natural break from being in 'threat-mode'.

Louise Hankinson is a Breathworks Teacher and Clinical Psychologist who has spent over 20 years working in primary and secondary mental health care services. She specialises in the application of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), mindfulness, and Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) to support mental health and wellbeing.



Yay!!!

Take care everyone.

With kindness

Pete

