

ProActive Caring e-News

September 2020



Take it from me, if you can breathe, you can meditate

By Lisa Nathan

I found meditation when I was lost, completely lost. I was living in a caregiver vortex, sole caregiver for my elderly mom, who was living with me, and for my husband, who had Alzheimer's. And three kids, including my middle son who is diagnosed with autism. Although I was perceived as having it all together, I felt broken inside. I was overwhelmed, over-stressed, and definitely not in a happy place.

One day I came across an article that suggested implementing quiet time in the morning, which led me to reading about the benefits of meditation. I have been an on-again, off-again yoga practitioner for years, I've dabbled in qigong, and I'm fairly well read; yet I really had no idea what it meant to meditate. Like so many others, I had some vague idea that meditating meant being able to stop your thoughts. Good luck with that!

But I was desperate, so I found a meditation app, and I sat. In the beginning, when I shut my eyes, it was as if a multiplex movie house erupted in my mind with all the movies playing at once. I eventually learned that my mind constantly battled between thoughts

of past events and future events (very typical) and played the same ruminating thoughts ad nauseam (also typical), all the while judging myself and berating myself as I sat (so typical). But I sat. Every day I showed up and sat. Eventually I started to 'hear' the voice we all have in our head that plays CONSTANTLY in the background. I'm talking about the 60,000-80,000 thoughts that most people have every day. So much noise!

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Slowly, I learned that meditation is not about quieting the mind at all, but about where we focus our awareness. It's about redirecting your awareness to a single point of focus (the breath is commonly used because it's always available!) and when your mind wanders — I guarantee it will — coming back to focus on your breath. It's that coming back which is the exercise that lets the mind settle into the present moment, taking you from an overactive mind into the stillness of the body.

Very slowly, I started to feel the benefits. My hearing and 'listening'



Lisa Nathan and her husband, Ben.

skills improved. I became more clearheaded and learned how to pause, giving me the ability to respond rather than react.

What did this mean? Less yelling at the kids, less anxiety, more peace, more forgiveness (of others and myself). Learning how to let all the swirling thoughts pass by without engaging with them. Learning how to live in the present moment. This process is incredibly simple, yet unbelievably powerful, and it is available to anyone: if you can breathe, you can meditate.

Almost four years later, I still meditate just about every day. There are times when it's fluid and comfortable and easy and other times when it feels like a struggle. I won't forgo all my earthly possessions and move to a mountaintop anytime soon, but I am learning how to live here, in this perfectly imperfect life, with a little more peace, a little more happiness, and a little more love.

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New digital resources will be available this month

A key resource of the ProActive Caring Digital Resource Center (PCDRC) is the manual for the ProActive Caring Caregiver Support Program, a program teaching mindfulness to support family members of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While the self-paced manual, created by Dr. Mindy Scirri and Theresa Drum, may be used alone and is designed for home use, two new digital resources will expand its functionality.

The first is a series of eight videos corresponding to the modules in the manual for the ProActive Caregiver Support Program. The videos were recorded by Dr. Scirri, with creative music compilations by her daughter, Alana J. Scirri, and video editing/

production assistance by her son, Nico V. Scirri.

The videos may be used either in conjunction with the digital manual or as a teach-alone platform supplemented by the manual. Either way, they will be useful to family members interested in learning strategies for reducing stress in their lives. They could also be used for virtual in-service training.

Spanish manual forthcoming

The second resource to be added is a copy of the manual for the ProActive Caring Caregiver Support Program in Spanish. The manual was translated by Fiona Rattray, Parent Training and Information Center



Specialist from Putnam Independent Living Services. Rattray has served as a facilitator for in-person ProActive Caring caregiver support programs and also as a member of one of the Program's Regional Advisory Councils.

We anticipate both resources will be added to the ProActive Caring Digital Resource Center (PCDRC) by or before Sept.10.

ProActive Caring to offer CEUs for social workers, LMHCs

Good news! Three continuing education units (CEUs) are now available for licensed social workers and Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHCs) who participate in online training offered by the ProActive Caring program.

Those interested in receiving continuing education hours will need to complete the ProActive Caring Caregiver Support curriculum; view other online materials, including a talk by Loretta Pyles, Ph.D., on "Healing Justice: Holistic Self-Care," and complete an evaluation instrument documenting what they have learned.

Interested social workers and LMHCs

should send their names, physical addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, and license numbers to proactivecaringprogram@gmail.com requesting details.

Those who requested CEUs during earlier in-person Train-the-Trainer programs will be contacted shortly regarding any additional steps that need to be completed in order for CEU's to be issued.

Social Work Continuing Education hours are available through a partnership with University at Albany School of Social Welfare. University at Albany School of Social Welfare is recognized by the New York State

Education Department's State Board for Social Work as an approved provider of continuing education for licensed social workers #0011.

Licensed Mental Health Counselor Continuing Education hours are available through a partnership with UAlbany School of Social Welfare and School of Education. University at Albany, School of Social Welfare and School of Education, Continuing Education Program is recognized by the New York State Education Department's State Board for Mental Health Practitioners as an approved provider of continuing education for licensed mental health counselors. #MHC-0039.

Contact us

Email: proactivecaringprogram@gmail.com • Call: 800-691-3980 (voicemail)

School Exchange continues in September

“ProActive Caring — School Exchange” programs continue this month. Moderated by Dr. Larry Force, they feature parent/advocate and mediator Lisa Nathan and school psychologist/advocate Peggy Pisano, and invited guests.

The webcasts explore how mindfulness can help family members cope with everyday stressors and build resilience. The ProActive Caring Program draws from the practice, tools and resources of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and is funded by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (NYS DDPC).

A Zoom link is circulated each week so you may join live via video or audio. Email proactivecaringprogram@gmail.com to be added to the distribution list.

The webcasts air live at 10 a.m. Wednesdays, run for about 30 minutes, and then open for questions, thoughts, and exchanges.

The programs are also recorded and posted in the ProActive Caring Digital Resource Center (PCDRC) at proactivecaring.org, along with related tools and resources.



Featured topics

Sept. 2: Being Present for Students in Uncertain Times.

Sept. 9: Now What? Mindfully Accessing School Services in the COVID World.

Sept. 16: Leading the Calm: Teaching at Home from a Parent Perspective.

Sept. 23: Being in the Present Moment: Finding Peace in Uncertain Times.

Sept. 30: Creating a Balanced Day: Blending School, Work, and Play in a Mindful Way.



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ProActive Caring creates Statewide Advisory Council

Group will ensure program's sustainability

Over the past three years, the ProActive Caring program's regional Advisory Councils have been invaluable in giving full voice to the needs and issues of caregivers of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as possible solutions to those matters.

As we now move to the next phase of the program, we are pleased to announce the creation of a ProActive Caring Statewide Advisory Council (PCSAC). PCSAC will be vital to ensuring continued success and oversight of the ProActive Caring project.

Like the Regional Advisory Councils (and indeed the ProActive Caring program itself), PCSAC includes self-advocates, family members, and staff members from community agencies and other organizations.

Who is involved

Inaugural members of the Statewide Advisory Council are Luis Abramson, Sandra Brownsey, Lisa Currao, Marcus Daitch, Nancy DeSando, Theresa Drum, Elisa Gwilliam, Joseph Munisteri, Dr. Kaylitz Oakes, Stacey Orzell, Fiona Rattray, Barbara Russell, Dr. Mindy Scirri, and Jennifer Sutton.

Responsibilities of the Council

1. Promoting the availability and benefits of the ProActive Caring program, so it reaches the maximum number of caregivers, including caregivers in un- and under-served communities.
2. Helping mobilize communities in support of individuals with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities — and their family caregivers.
3. Providing guidance in the implementation and fine-tuning of sustainability measures for ProActive Caring and helping to identify possible additional resources for long-term funding and support.



Parent Network of WNY provides education and resources for families of individuals with special needs.



Parent Network is committed to providing parents and caregivers with a rich skillset of information and tools including mindfulness.

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