

# Mindful Work

## Some common problems that adopters and foster carers report, and how mindfulness may help

### When your thoughts seem out of control

- Learn to step back from your thoughts and observe the turmoil in your mind, as if you were watching words on a movie screen. Just say 'thinking' to yourself.
- Try naming the thoughts, as if they are cranky old friends – 'ah there's Mrs Angry, and here's Mr Blame'. Have a laugh at how they may be well-meaning, but are actually not useful or appropriate any more.
- Recognise the patterns. How we think is just a complex series of patterns or habits that we've created over decades of repetition. The good news is that these patterns of thinking can and will change, if we take them less seriously and take away their power.
- You are not your thoughts. Thoughts can have a life of their own, but you can choose to dis-believe them. Doubt is useful, curiosity is even better.
- When your mind is busy, use the breathing or body scan practice with words such as 'breathing in' on the in-breath, and 'letting go' on the out-breath.
- STOP – see the notes on this technique.
- Have compassion for everyone and everything, and that includes yourself. We are all struggling and trying to keep balance in some way, but sometimes things get out of balance, so go easy on yourself and on others, equally.

### When you feel emotionally exhausted, or experience secondary trauma

- Make time for yourself. Sometimes you just need to replenish your own energy as a priority.
- Do whatever restores your health – you need to be in a good place in order to help others in your care better.
- Be aware of when you are suffering chronic anxiety or depression, and get help.
- Use your practice to find a point of stillness within yourself, that you can touch when you need to.
- Be patient and be kind to yourself – you're doing your best. If that's not enough, ask for help but just do what you can, no more.

### Feeling out of control of events/children/ care system etc

- Take control of what you can, and accept changes that you can't control. It may not be what you want, but if you always fight with what is, you may run out of energy.
- Be aware of our natural and immediate reaction to all things – in essence to either want/seek/hold on to, or to avoid/push away/fight against. Be aware of this constant push and pull. Step back and observe the struggle with a smile.

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## **Addressing sadness / loss**

- We don't often get just what we want, and we often get what we don't want. It's ok to feel sad or regretful, but there can be tendency to blame and get angry, both of which sap our energy.
- Although life may disappoint us, we have to come to terms with what is on our plate. This may be a gradual process, working through the stages of grief. Let the process happen but be aware if you're getting stuck at some point. Keep moving on and processing your feelings.

## **Self-esteem, feeling a failure**

- Fostering and adoption are amazing, challenging jobs and a way of life. Even when things are challenging, know that you are doing a wonderful and compassionate thing.
- If you do your best, you can forgive yourself for not being superwoman/man.
- Find other activities that you are good at or just enjoy fully – don't let them slip. Being a rounded person is not just good for you, it also gives a good example to the children in our care.

## **Feeling alone and misunderstood**

- Many people, even close family and friends, and some professionals, will simply not 'get it'. Don't get angry about that, you need to be in it to understand it.
- Find people to befriend, either in person or online on forums, who have similar experience and will totally understand and support you.