

THE MINDFUL VETERINARIAN: SETTING BOUNDARIES & SELF-CARE

Dr. Heather Gunn McQuillan



Who Am I?

- **Veterinarian:**
 - DVM, Ontario Veterinary College (2005)
 - Private practice, industry and academia experience
 - Currently the Assistant Dean @ AVC
- **Wellness Practitioner & Advocate**
 - M.Ed. (in Process) in Mindfulness Based Teaching and Learning & Adult Education & Trained MBSR teacher (2021)
 - University of Tennessee (School of Veterinary Social Work) Compassion Fatigue Management Certificate (2019)
 - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) (2018) & Mental Health First Aid (2017)
 - Yogi: RYT200 (2018), 500h (in progress)
- **Leadership & Communication Specialist**
 - Mediation Practitioner Certification (in progress)
 - Institute of Healthcare Communications Graduate (2018)
 - Strengths Deployment Inventory (SDI) facilitator (2018)
 - AAVMC Leadership Academy graduate (2017)
- **Entrepreneur**
- **Hobbyist**
- **MOM, partner, daughter, sister, friend**



Who Else Am I?

- I am a mother with a demanding career and two young kids
- I am a Workaholic and a Perfectionist
- I struggle with work/life balance
- I struggle with guilt (both at home, at play, and at work)
- I suffered from post-partum depression
- I suffered from insomnia
- I suffered from compassion fatigue
- I suffer(ed) from burnout- And now Covid Burnout
- I have experienced loss and grief
- I have felt like a failure
- I have had “imposter syndrome”
- I have felt anxiety and had panic attacks
- Sometimes I am sad, overwhelmed, frustrated, angry, hopeless, helpless, and afraid



Why tell you all of this?

- I am MORE than my “Facebook Life”
 - We **ALL** suffer
- Practicing meditation/mindfulness, yoga, nature appreciation, gratitude, and living with purpose have all helped me on my personal wellness journey
- Exploring vulnerability (& hope!)



Introduce Yourself

- In the chat I invite you to:
 - Share your location & a bit about your job/school
 - Private practice? Student? Industry? Academia?
- Welcome to:
 - Share some of the hats you wear
 - Share what you'd like to get from this session



Our Agenda:

- Mindfulness refresher with practice
- Boundary Setting in Veterinary Medicine
 - Why it's hard
 - Talking about the inner critic & practicing self-compassion
- Tips for boundary setting
- Take-aways
- Throughout:
 - Practices
 - Resources
 - Information
 - Discussion



Welcome: Three Mindful Breaths

Three.
Deep.
Breaths.



A Brief Refresher: What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through **paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment,**” Using 7 Key Facets (+2 extras):

- Non-Judgment
- Non-Striving
- Acceptance
- Letting Go
- Beginner's Mind
- Patience
- Trust
- (Compassion)
- (Kindness)



What Are Mindfulness Practices

- **Seated Practice (meditation)*****
 - Guided
 - Mindful Self-Compassion
 - 3-minute Breathing Space
 - RAIN
 - Loving kindness (metta)
- **Mindful Movement *****
 - Gentle Yoga
 - Walking Meditation
- **Body Scan**
- **Informal Practices**
 - Breath awareness ***
 - Weaving mindfulness throughout your day
 - Gratitude
 - Noticing body sensations, thoughts & emotions Mindful eating
 - Mindful shopping
 - Nature appreciation



*** Practices we will try today

Practice: The Mindful Minute

- Great for the office/clinic
- We're going to count our breaths for 1 minute
- Take slow even breaths, breathing in the nose and exhaling out through the nose or mouth
- Make note of your number of breaths
- Next time you feel stressed/anxious/on edge, pause and count to your number and you will have practiced a mindful minute



Evidence-Based Benefits of Mindfulness

- **Reduces stress**
- Reduces anxiety
- Aids in managing depression
- Promotes emotional health
- Enhances self-awareness
- Lengthens attention span
- May reduce age-related memory loss
- Promotes kindness
- Assists with battling addiction
- Improves sleep
- Helps control pain
- Lowers blood pressure
- Increases immune function
- Prevent or manage mental illness
- Rebuilds brain tissue (neuroplasticity)

DID YOU
REMEMBER
TO TAKE YOUR
MEDITATION
TODAY?



EVERYBODYHASABRAIN

Resource: Evidence for Mindfulness in Medicine & Veterinary Medicine

- “Effect of a mindfulness exercise on stress in veterinary students performing surgery.”
- Piloting a Mindfulness-Based Intervention to Veterinary Students: Learning and Recommendations.
- Mind-body therapies: an intervention to reduce work-related stress in veterinary academia.
- Association of an educational program in mindful communication with burnout, empathy, and attitudes among primary care physicians.
- Can mindfulness in health care professionals improve patient care? An integrative review and proposed model.
- Self-reported modifying effects of resilience factors on perceptions of workload, patient outcomes, and burnout in physician-attendees of an international emergency medicine conference.
- Interventions to Reduce Burnout and Improve Resilience: Impact on a Health System's Outcomes.

Practice: Mindful Movement

- Notice body sensations, thoughts, and emotions that arise.
- These may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral
- No need for judgment or a story. **Just notice**



Breathing & Movement: What Did You Notice?

What did you notice?



Boundary Setting in Veterinary Medicine



Why Do We Struggle Setting Boundaries

- **Workplace culture & societal pressure**
 - On call & “always on” expectations
 - Long-hours
 - Just one more thing
 - High expectations & guilt
 - Taught in vet school and as children to not say “no”
 - Busyness as a “Badge of Honour”
- **Conflict avoiders**
 - 40/68 AVC students prefer avoidance style of conflict in the TKCI
 - Fear of social media backlash
- **High stakes** (lives at stake)



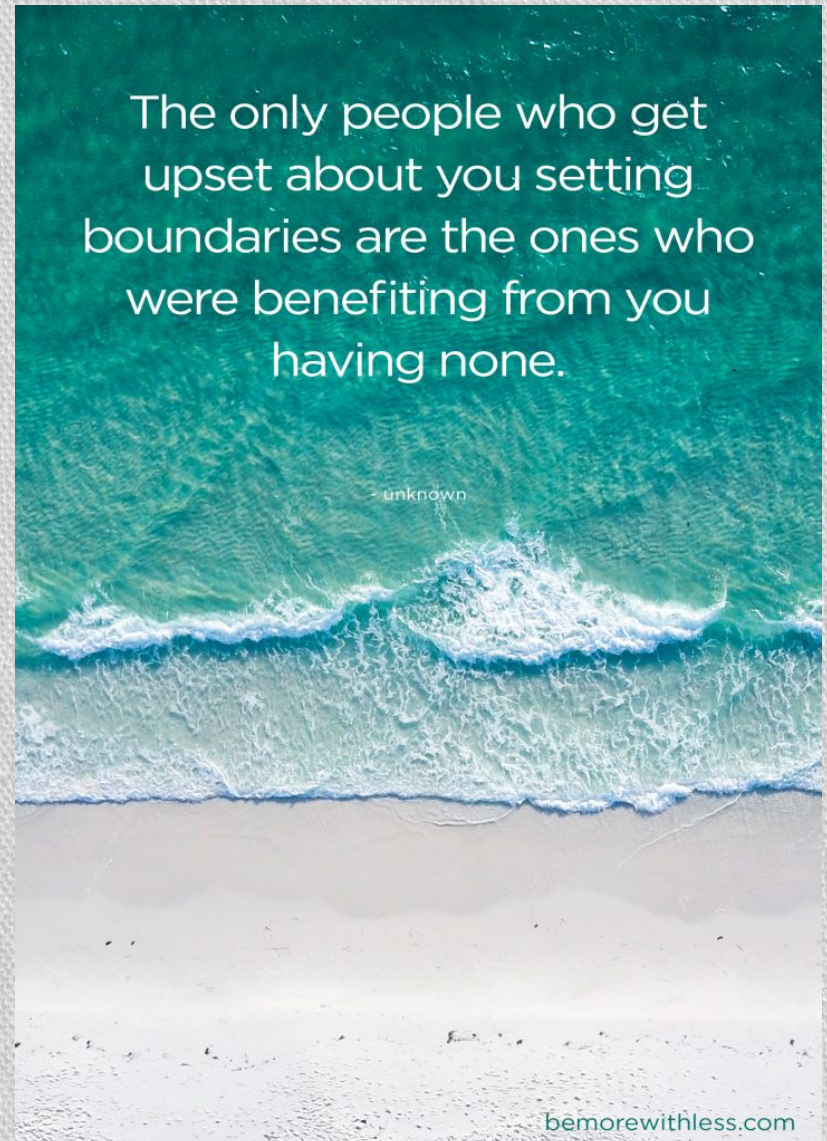
Why Do We Struggle Setting Boundaries

- **People-pleasing & perfectionism*****

- Want to help others, but don't want to be helped
- Worry what people will think if we say "no"
- Striving/competitive
- Trying to do the impossible
 - Be the best parent
 - Be the best partner
 - The best friend, siblings, child, etc.....

- **It's HARD!!!**

- Hard to change the rules in the "middle of the game"
- We may not even know what are boundaries are



Perfectionism & the Inner Critic

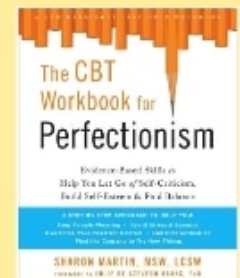
- Society teaches us to strive and marketing teaches us to compare ourselves to impossible standards
- Common in medicine as tend to be driven, high achievers
- Perfectionism tells us that we're never good enough (inner critic)
- Source of stress/anxiety
- Can get in the way of living our lives to the fullest
- Painfully high standards for self and others
- Belief that achievement = self worth
- Perfectionism shows up in many ways including in our thoughts, emotions, and body sensations.

What is Perfectionism?

"Perfectionism isn't just a desire to be the best. It means we set impossibly high standards for ourselves (and possibly for others) that we can never reach. It means we criticize ourselves relentlessly when we make mistakes and see them as fatal flaws rather than a natural part of the learning process. Perfectionism means we never feel good enough because we base our self-worth on what we do, what we achieve, and what others think of us."

-Sharon Martin, LCSW

blogs.psychcentral.com/imperfect





Comparison is the
thief of joy.

Theodore Roosevelt

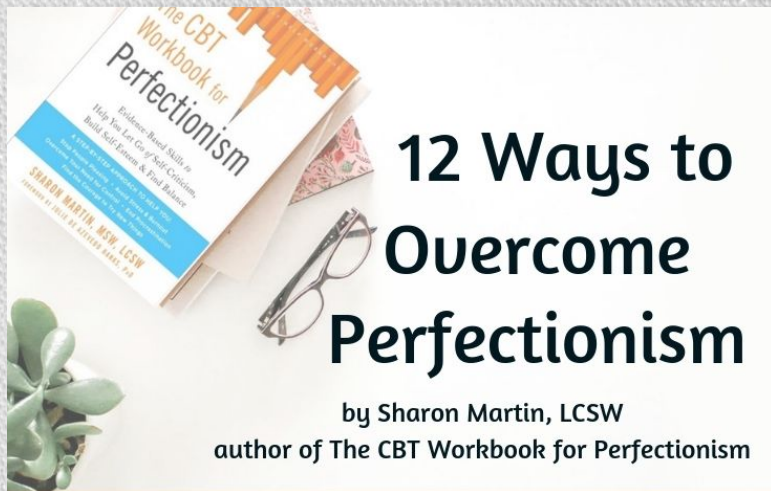
“ quote fancy

Brainstorming Perfectionism and the Inner Critic

- Who experiences perfectionism or a strong inner critic voice? (show of hands)
- How does it show up for you?
 - Where do you notice perfectionism / critic? (What situations?)
 - What does it look like (what traits do you notice)?
 - What are the thoughts that accompany it (what does the inner critic say)?
 - Body sensations?
 - Emotions?
- If you can name it you can tame it
 - Resource (Ted Talk): “This Talk Isn’t Very Good: Dancing with the Inner Critic”
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Inf-Ka3ZmOM>



Resource: CBT Workbook for Perfectionism

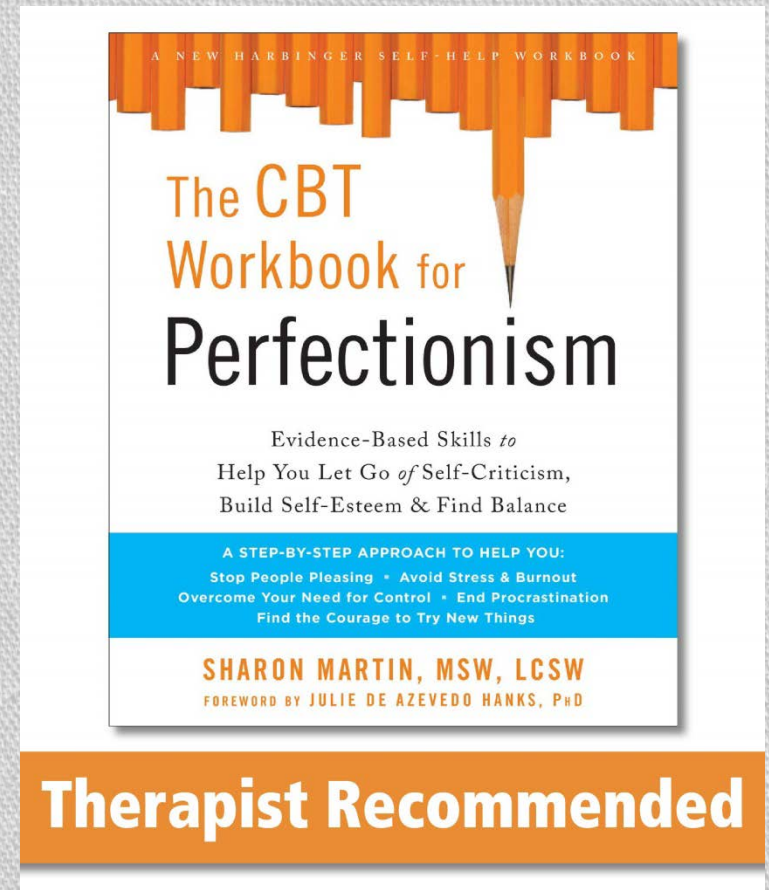


1. Set realistic expectations for yourself and others.
2. Practice self-compassion.
3. Adopt a growth mindset.
4. Focus on your character, not your accomplishments.
5. Enjoy the process, not just the outcome.
6. Be true to yourself and give up people-pleasing.
7. Be more assertive.
8. Challenge your negative thoughts.
9. Allow yourself to do some things imperfectly.
10. Instead of comparing yourself to others, know your worth.
11. Get to know yourself.
12. Love your imperfect self.

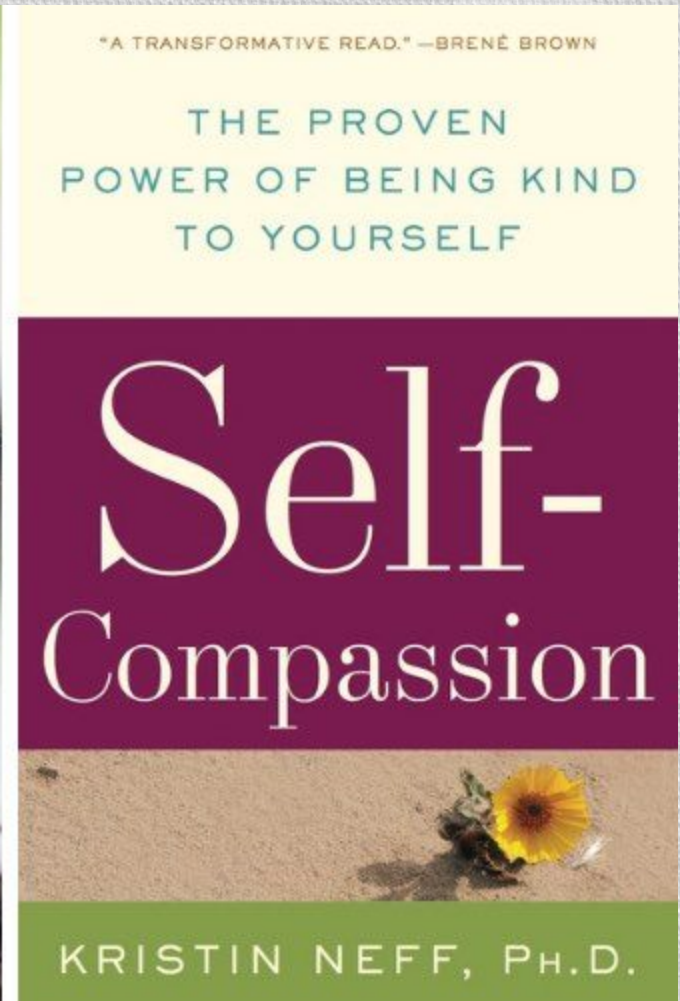
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How do we work with Perfectionism and the Inner Critic.... Mindful Self-compassion



What is Mindful Self Compassion?

Three steps:

1. ****Awareness (mindfulness)****

- This is a moment of stress/suffering/pain
- I'm saying terrible things to myself
- This sucks, this hurts, this is stress, this is BS, ouch (or other 4-letter words)

2. **Common humanity**

- Struggling and suffering are part of life
- Other people feel like this, I'm not alone, we all struggle, we all make mistakes

3. **Offer self-kindness**

- Like what you would say to a friend going through the same thing
- What do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?
- "You got this," "It's going to be ok," "May I be strong," "May I be kind to myself," etc.



The Importance of Supportive Touch in Self-Compassion Practice

- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system
 - Helps us calm down and feel safe
- It may feel awkward or at first, but your body doesn't know that
 - Lots of ways to try it... find one that feels right
 - One or two hands on the heart
 - Squeeze on forearm
 - Rubbing/squeezing upper arm/thigh
 - Hands on belly or hand on belly and heart
 - +/- Pressure
- Our skin is an incredibly sensitive organ.
 - Physical touch releases oxytocin
 - Provides a sense of security
 - Soothes distressing emotions
 - Calms cardiovascular stress.



As Veterinarians We Know the Power of Supportive Touch

Temple Grandin's Experience & Research



Practice: Self-Compassion Break



What Did You Notice?



A Takeaway Idea: Self-Compassion Letter



CHRISTOPHER
GERMER

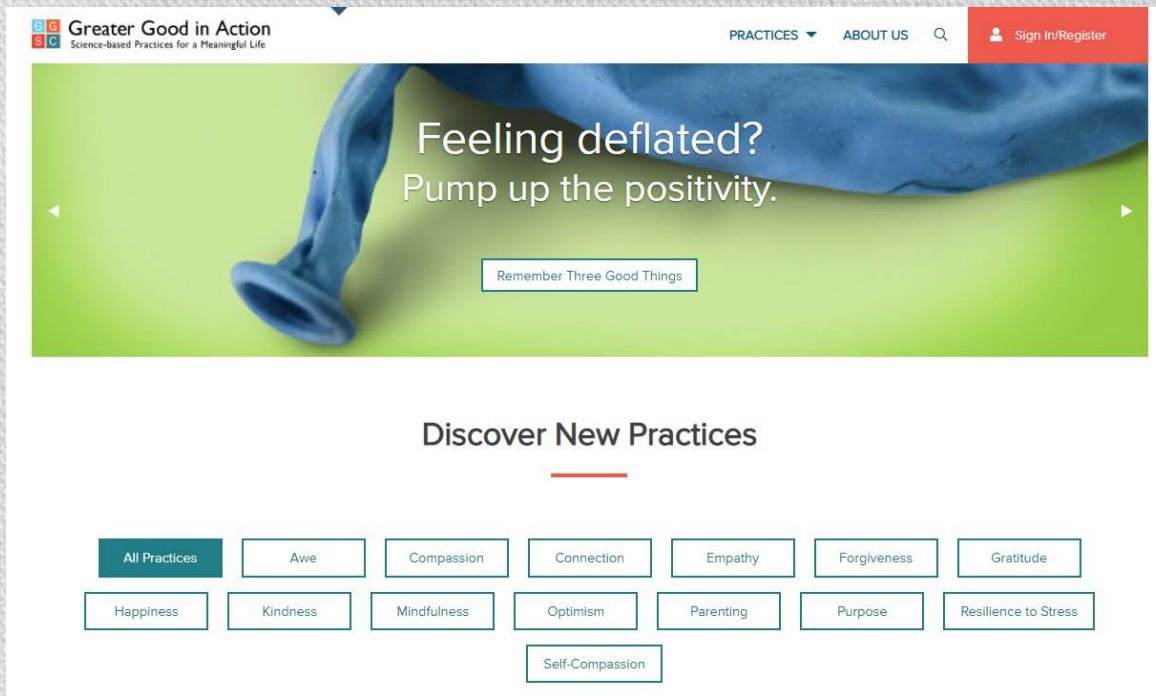
“A moment of self-compassion can change your entire day. A string of such moments can change the course of your life.”

www.ClassicalGuitarShed.com

UC Berkeley's Great Good In Action Centre: Self Compassion Letter Exercise:

- Participants who wrote a **self-compassionate letter** every day for a week reported **lower symptoms of depression** and **greater happiness** three months later than they had beforehand
- https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/self_compassionate_letter

Resource: UC Berkeley's Greater Good In Action Center



https://ggia.berkeley.edu/?_ga=2.203647763.208372390.1618255357-1305682919.1612757955



Why Talk About This?

- Many of us consider leaving the profession at some point
 - Burnout & compassion fatigue
 - Client stress & patient loss
 - Financial pressure
 - **Not feeling “good enough”**
 - Making mistakes or fear of failure
 - **Unmet expectations**
- We think that once we hit a milestone everything will fall into place and be **perfect**
 - Perfection **doesn't exist** and **creates perpetual striving** to find it
 - When it doesn't happen, we say “I'm not happy, so I'm in the wrong profession”
 - **Self-compassion can help us work through embracing imperfection**
 - **Mindfulness can help us increase our awareness of what we're happy with and what we're not**
 - Job Crafting
 - Setting Boundaries
 - It can take a long time to find the right fit



How Do We Set Boundaries? Useful Tips & Tricks

7 Tips for Setting Healthy Boundaries

and end

1

Start your day with limit-setting intentions.

Know from the start what you are capable of taking on.

And what you will leave at work

2

Acknowledge what you gain by setting boundaries.

This allows you to re-center and remain committed, even when things get tough.

Knowing that when you say “yes” to work, you say “no” to something else!

3

Define your priorities.

Get clear on what you need, what you want, and what would be nice to have.

4

Communicate directly, clearly, and often.

Telling people about your boundaries is your responsibility.

Saying “NO”

5

Pay attention to your needs.

Feelings of discomfort, overwhelm, or resentment are often indicators that we’ve overreached a boundary.

=Self Care

6

Start with small adjustments.

Committing to and following through with small boundary changes builds your confidence to make harder decisions in the future.

7

Practice self-compassion.

If you don’t follow through with the boundaries you set, instead of judging yourself respond with kindness.

Gain more resilience resources at aduro.life.

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Saying “No”

- “No,” is a complete sentence
- There are 3 steps to saying “No”
 - Step 1: open your mouth
 - Step 2: say “no”
 - Step 3: close your mouth
- The “No, but” for those who struggle with “No.”
- Saying “No,” is your responsibility... OWN IT!



Other Ways to Say "NO"

1. *No thanks, I have another commitment.*
2. *Unfortunately, it's not a good time.*
3. *Apologies, but I can't make it.*
4. *Sounds great, but I can't commit.*
5. *I wish I could make it work.*
6. *I'd love to - but can't.*
7. *Perhaps next season when things clear up.*
8. *Thanks for thinking of me, but I can't.*
9. *No thank you, but it sounds lovely.*
10. *It's not a good idea for me.*
11. *I really appreciate you asking me, but I can't do it.*
12. *I can't take on any more responsibilities.*
13. *That doesn't work for me.*
14. *I'm sorry I'm busy.*
15. *My body says yes, but my heart says no.*



Creating a starting & closing “routine”

- **Like whiteboard rounds which bookend each shift have personal rounds**
 - **Start of day:**
 - What’s leftover from yesterday that needs attention?
 - What new priorities need to get accomplished?
 - Evaluate if those tasks are realistic in the time you have (if not, what gets dropped)
 - Create a contingency for “derailments”
 - **End of day:**
 - Reflect on the day
 - Any key learning?
 - Celebrate successes
 - What didn’t get done that can be done tomorrow?
 - Are there critical pieces that need attention?
 - **Returning home:**
 - Make a dedicated change
 - Commit to letting go of the day before reconnecting with family/friends
 - Mindful minute
 - 3 mindful breaths
 - Reconnecting with intention & priorities



Stopping the Bleed

- **Location, location, location**
 - Everything in it's right place
- **Containing the bleed**
 - When work bleeds into our personal lives can we put boundaries around them?
 - Amount of time?
 - Negotiating when and where with others in the household
 - Turn off e-mail and other work related notifications



“At first, you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary. Do it anyway and tell yourself you have a right to self-care. Setting boundaries takes practice and determination. Don’t let anxiety or low self-esteem prevent you from taking care of yourself.” ~ Terri Cole

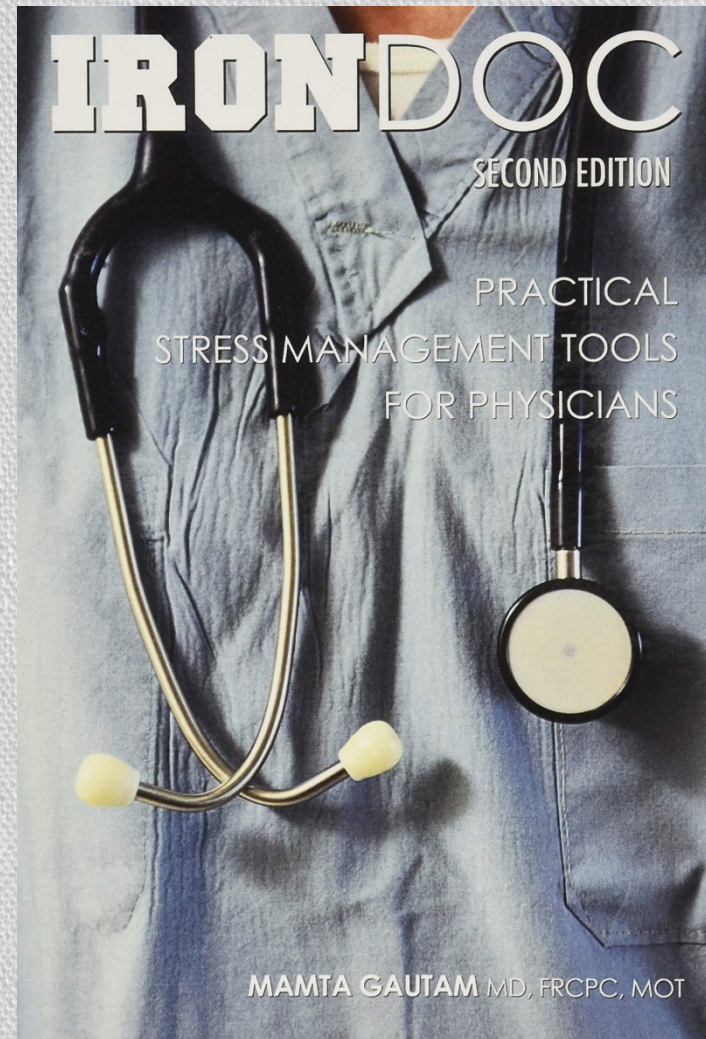
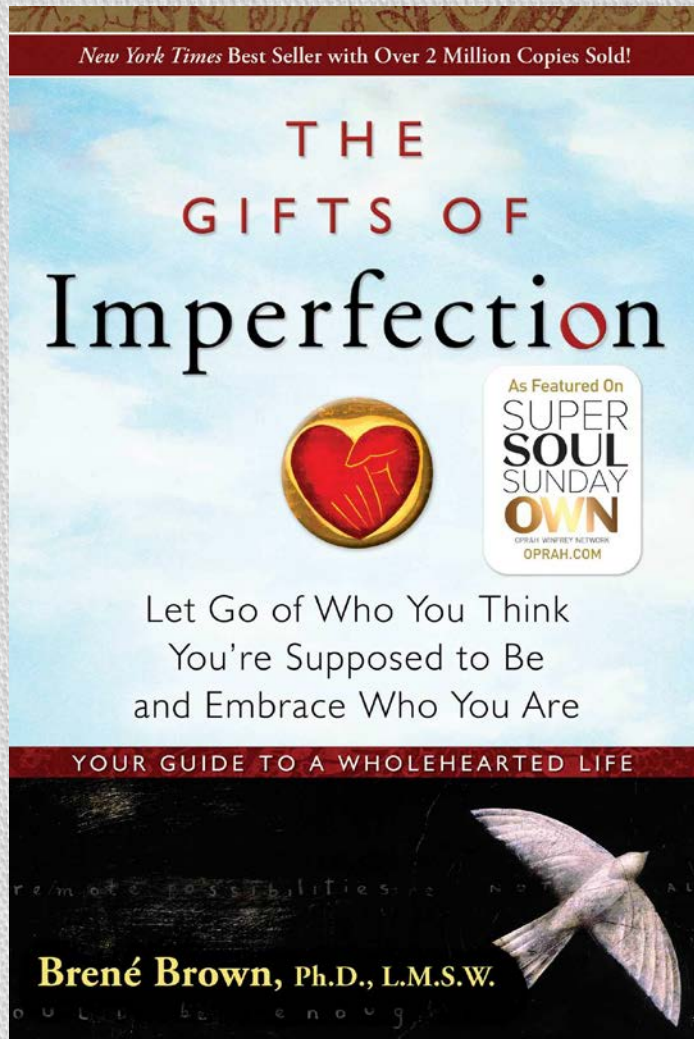
Embrace your JOY

- Discover your “happy places”
- Adopt an attitude of gratitude
 - Journaling
 - 3 things your grateful for from the day
 - Something that made you happy/smile/laugh
- Make your time off YOURS
 - Set gratuitous auto-responders
 - Walk away from your cell-phone
 - **Take your vacation – ALL OF IT!**
 - Many people do not take the vacation days they earn
 - Take time to enjoy everything you have worked so hard for



Find
YOUR *happy*
PLACE
and go **THERE**
often.

Two More Amazing Resources

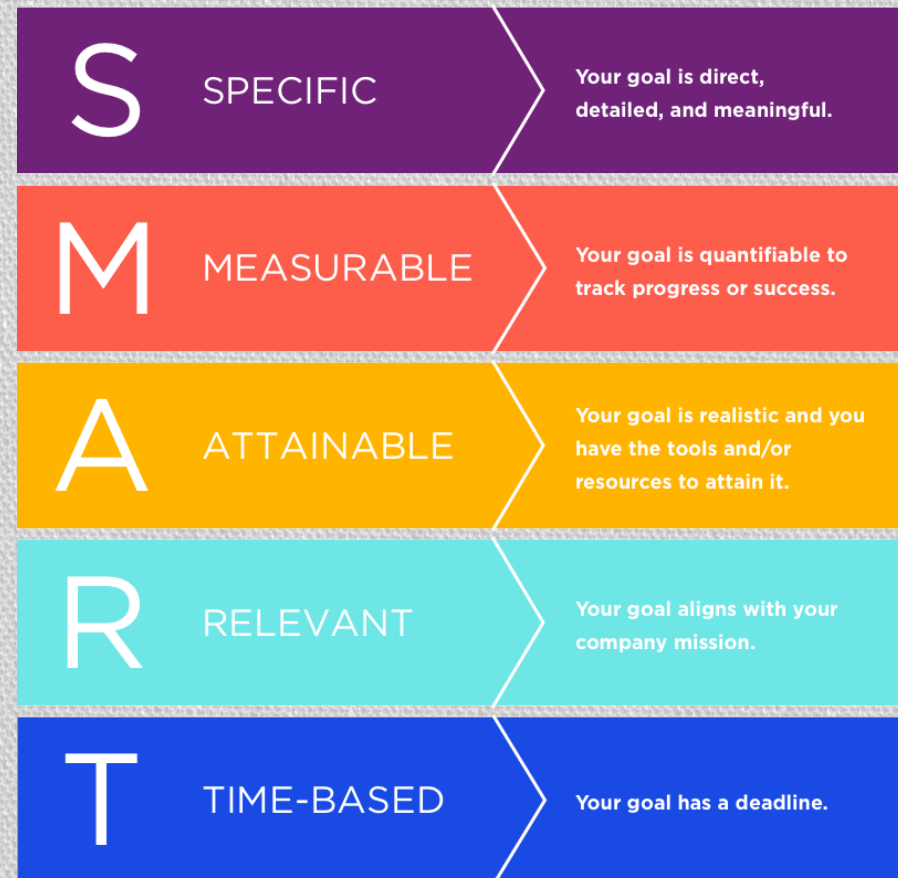


One Final Tip: The WRAP App



What is WRAP?

- **Wellness Recovery Action Plan**
- Free app for iOS and Android
 - Build your customized wellness toolbox
 - Create a daily plan
 - Identify stressors & create a response plan
 - Creating a plan for when things are breaking down or when you're in crisis
 - Can create a PDF version of the plan to yourself or others
- Why? SMART goals
- <https://mentalhealthrecovery.com/wrapapp/>



Practice: The 5 Senses to Calm Anxiety



SIGHT



TOUCH



TASTE



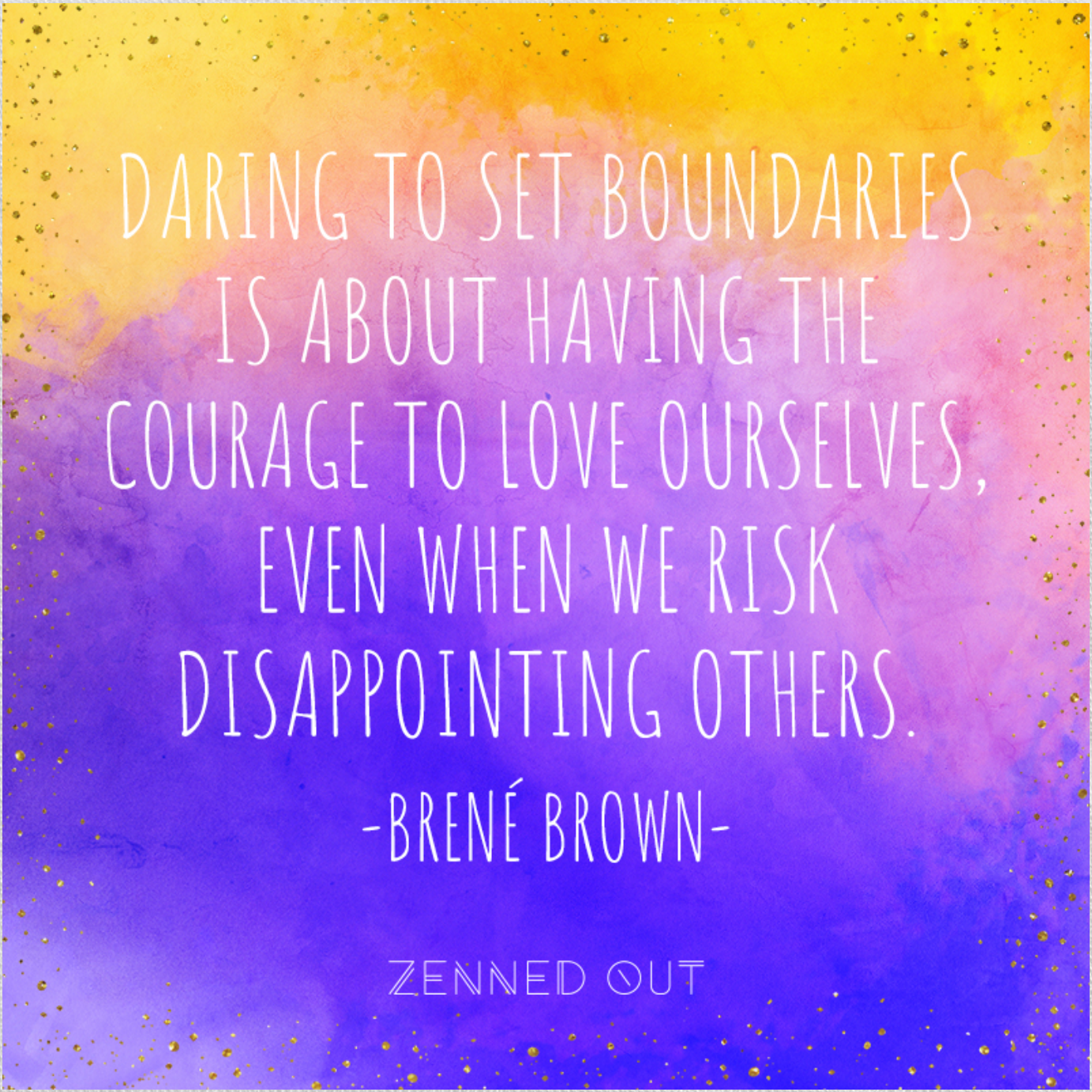
SMELL



HEARING

Take Home Message

- **Mindfulness is one of many self-care strategies**
 - There are practices you can use in the clinic setting including:
 - Mindful minute
 - 3-mindful breaths
 - Mindful movement
 - 5-senses practice to calm anxiety
 - **A self-compassion practice** can quiet the inner critic and help with boundary setting. Here are some practices to try:
 - Self-compassion for caregivers (Neff): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ9wGfwE-YE>
 - Self-compassion break short (Neff): https://self-compassion.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/self-compassion.break__01-cleanedbydan.mp3
 - Self-compassion break short (Germer): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ax8Y741rxA>
 - Self-compassion break long (Germer): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_8oy_CT32c
 - Self-compassion letter: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/self_compassionate_letter
- **Creating a wellness plan solidifies your wellness goals & makes them SMART**
- **Setting boundaries & self-care** are critical for career longevity, personal wellness, and balance. This is not a luxury or an indulgence, this is **ESSENTIAL!**



DARING TO SET BOUNDARIES
IS ABOUT HAVING THE
COURAGE TO LOVE OURSELVES,
EVEN WHEN WE RISK
DISAPPOINTING OTHERS.

-BRENÉ BROWN-

ZENNED OUT

Questions?

