

Three steps for cultivating relaxation during challenging times

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Relaxation, what is it? More importantly, how do we get more of it? These questions seem particularly relevant during turbulent times. Turn on any morning news show and we're bombarded by negative messages, followed by experts who preach the benefits of relaxation and tell us to prioritize it. But how do we do that? Let's better understand what relaxation looks like and then identify tools that can help us cultivate it.

RELAXATION DEFINED

Think of a time in life when you felt relaxed. How did you know you were relaxed? What was the

feeling in your body? What were your thoughts like? What was it about that moment that made you sigh out loud and say "now this is the life?"

According to dictionary.com, relaxation is "the state of being free from tension and anxiety." We love this definition. We often think of relaxation as being slow and still – and sometimes it is. That is the beauty of practices like yoga and meditation which include intentionality, slowing down and presence.

While relaxation for some may be found in stillness, others may find relaxation in action. Perhaps you're most relaxed when dusting off your vocal chords or dancing shoes and cranking up your favorite music for a jam



session. Or, perhaps relaxation comes to you during moments of humor and belly laughter. Create your personal definition of relaxation and keep that in mind as you work through these three steps.

STEP 1: ASK YOURSELF WHY

In the search for relaxation, the first thing to identify is why you want it. How will your day be different with more moments of feeling free and at ease? If the reason to change is not strong enough, the effort will seem like wasted energy or just another thing to do on the ever-growing list. However, if you know that you will be more productive, creative, energetic or fun, it might be enough to initiate a change.

When thinking about your why, consider the process you go through when learning to drive.

- You start with logging practice hours behind the wheel before being eligible for the driver's test.
- While those hours were occasionally frustrating because of mom slamming the imaginary brake or gasping at every corner, they were meaningful for promoting freedom.
- Each mile logged was one step closer that that license. The same might be true for relaxation. Each moment you find puts you on the path toward more.

Find a clear and specific reason or need and use this as your compass.

STEP 2: CONSIDER WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED

The second step in fostering relaxation is to know what type is needed in that moment. If you have been sitting at your desk most of the day in a very quiet and still setting, your idea of freedom might involve getting outside, going to the park and walking the dog. On the flip side, if you have been on your feet all day, running from task to task, computer to computer or meeting to meeting you might need a calm, quiet place enriched by stillness. Once you know what the need is, take an action. It can be as simple as that.

STEP 3: TRUST YOURSELF

The third step is trust. Trust that the action you take will create a result. A felt sense of relaxation cannot be forced or guaranteed, but regular practice can promote it. Think of the quest for relaxation like trying to catch a lightning bug...there are many different approaches to it, while none are guaranteed, the excitement may be more in the chase than the catch.

AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR DAILY LIFE

Relaxation may sound like a luxury, but it's not. It's an essential part of resilience, or our ability to cope with life's ups and downs. Self-care is always important, but it's particularly necessary during tumultuous times. Consider how you can apply these steps to find more relaxing moments in your daily life.

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