

# Family Fundamentals

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

## How being mindful can benefit relationships

**A friend has become a big believer in the power of mindfulness. Recently she said she thinks it has helped improve her marriage. I thought mindfulness was really just a new word for meditation. How can it help with relationships with other people?**

While meditation can help a person develop mindfulness, the practice of being mindful is more than meditation. And some studies do suggest that mindfulness can help strengthen relationships.

Jon Kabat-Zinn is known as the “Father of Western Mindfulness” for his work with chronic pain patients at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, as well as for developing the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program and being the founding executive director of the Center for Mindfulness at UMass. He describes mindfulness as the ability to remain focused on the reality of the present moment and simply accepting it, without judging or evaluating it.

Mindfulness is seen as a way of life, not simply a method of how to react to different stressors. According to the center’s website, mindfulness involves purposeful action and focused attention that’s grounded in a person’s current experience and held with a sense of curiosity. While mindfulness is a core concept of Buddhism, it is something that anyone, regardless of belief system, can practice.

Being mindful prevents knee-jerk reactions toward other people that can often occur when you’re under stress. So, it seems logical that relationships can improve when one or more people adopt mindfulness techniques. And research lends support to that notion.

One study, published in Behavior Therapy in



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2004, analyzed the benefits of an eight-week mindfulness training program on relatively happy couples. Compared with similar couples who hadn’t taken the training, those who did had improved levels of satisfaction, closeness, acceptance and other measures of their relationship, and they also showed higher levels of optimism, spirituality and relaxation as individuals. The results appeared to “take,” as the benefits were maintained in a three-month follow-up.

Two other studies, reported in an article in the Journal of Marital and Family Therapy in 2007, also indicated that practicing mindfulness can help couples with communication and help them manage conflicts more smoothly.

To learn more about mindfulness, take a look at Ohio State University Extension’s “Mind and Body” page on the Family and Consumer Sciences Live Smart Ohio website, [livesmartohio.osu.edu](http://livesmartohio.osu.edu). The posts, written by OSU Extension professionals, often incorporate aspects of mindfulness.

In addition, OSU Extension offers a four-week “Mindful Extension: A Guide to Practical Stress Reduction” group program. It was developed by Maryanna Klatt, an associate professor at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, who focuses her research on mindfulness and stress reduction. For details, see [livesmartohio.osu.edu/mindful-extension](http://livesmartohio.osu.edu/mindful-extension).

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**Dear Subscriber:** This column was reviewed by Patrice Powers-Barker, family and consumer sciences educator with Ohio State University Extension. Powers-Barker is one of the educators who offers the Mindful Extension program.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*

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