



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
by *Keri Forbess-McCorquodale, MS, LPC, LMFT, CEAP*

Letting Go Of: Being Anywhere But "Here"

Stressed? Overwhelmed? Anxious? Depressed?
Have I got a tip for you! It's time to learn to be "in the moment."

A common symptom of all the above-named issues is a lack of focus and concentration. I hear it all the time – "I go into rooms and I can't remember why I'm there." "I think of three things I need to do, and I lose the last two before I finish the first." "I have so much work to do, but I can't seem to stay on track."

In fact, we have a term for it in the workplace – "presenteeism." It means employees who are at work physically, but not mentally.

The reason we find it difficult to focus when we're feeling less than tip-top is because we're thinking more about our situation than the present. The problem is the more we think about the problem, the worse we feel. We all have situations arise in our lives that seem insurmountable and bigger than us. It is during those times that I want you to focus on being "in the moment."

What does "in the moment" mean? It means that you think about only where you are and what you are doing at that time. Have you ever driven home from work and couldn't remember the trip? That's because you weren't "in the moment." Your mind was elsewhere and your body was on autopilot. Being in the moment means a full awareness of your surroundings – sights, smells, and sounds. It means tuning in to the person who's talking to you so you don't have to keep asking them to repeat what they just said. It means staying focused on the task at hand so you can make some headway.

Why does staying "in the moment" help? Here are some reasons:

Breathe! – The fastest/easiest way to get "in the moment" is to take a deep breath. (I'll wait while you do that now.) Breathe in through your nose, extend your diaphragm (not your chest/shoulders), and breathe out very slowly. Listen to the sound of the breath. Feel your heartbeat. Slow down. One of the typical responses to stress is we begin to take shallow breaths from the chest area. This only increases our heart rate, which causes us to feel even more stressed.

Taking a mental break – sometimes when things aren't going so great in our lives, we find that all we do is think about the problem. How did the problem happen? What's going to happen next? Will the problem ever be resolved? Many times it feels as if the issue will go on forever, and we can't see anything beyond it. It is helpful to take a break from thinking about and worrying about the situation. An easy way to do this is to focus on the here and now – what do you see? What do you hear?

Sense of accomplishment – when so much is going wrong, it is helpful to feel like you are doing something right. When you can have a focused conversation with your child instead of numbly saying "uh-huh," you know you did at least one thing right today. When you have a huge, overwhelming task ahead of you, staying focused long enough to do the easiest baby step of the task still helps you feel like you're on your way.

Feeling in control – as with most things in life, the real problem we are usually experiencing is a feeling of lack of control (not whatever we think the issue is). We don't like it when we are not the masters of our own destinies. Learning to be wholly present instead of worrying about yesterday or tomorrow will reinforce that you really are in control of much of your life. You are particularly in control of the amount of time and energy you are going to spend thinking about situations that may be causing you to feel stressed.

Remember, the only thing you really have is right here, right now. Yesterday is gone, no matter how great or horrible it was. Tomorrow is not here, so we can't bank on that either. Get focused on the only time guarantee you have – this moment.