Feeling Frazzled? Find Your Center at Meditation Mondays

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Between hectic mid-semester schedules and the impending holidays, there are plenty of reasons employees might be feeling stressed this time of year. One way to help manage that stress might be attending Meditation Mondays, a free, guided meditation group, led by UA employees, that's open to campus and community members with or without any prior meditation experience.

"We get so little training in life around how to work with all of our mental activity, and I find that many of us are really disconnected from messages that our body will give us about if we're stressed or at ease," said Leslie Langbert, executive director of the UA Center for Compassion Studies and one of the Meditation Mondays facilitators. "A lot of what we do (at Meditation Mondays) helps to bring an introduction to that or help anchor people back to that."

Meditation Mondays are held every Monday at 5:45 p.m. at the Ada Peirce McCormick Building, also known as the Little Chapel of All Nations, 1052 N. Highland Ave. New and experienced meditators are invited to join the hourlong, walk-in, small-group sessions.

"It's a come one, come all experience," Langbert said.

Each session begins with informal introductions of participants, who are given the opportunity to talk about their day or what's going on in their lives. Facilitators then lead a guided meditation, based on the needs of those in the room.

"Many have never meditated before, so we go into really simple, basic mindful meditation that's just attuning to the here and now, anchoring into the body and noticing where we are," Langbert said. "Sometimes we have folks come in who are moving through a stressful situation at work or they're feeling stressed with the news cycle, and we can sort of move into a theme that way. It's different every week."

A common myth about meditation is that it's just a matter of sitting in silence and figuring out on your own how to empty your mind, Langbert said. In a guided meditation, facilitators offer prompts throughout the process. For example, Langbert might ask participants to focus on the weight of their body or the natural movement of their breath.

"We give you cues so that your mind has something to work with," she said. "The mind is really adept at thinking about things that have already happened or things that haven't happened yet, but our minds are less trained to be able to hold our attention or awareness in the present moment. So what we do is designed to be gentle guidance for that."

Langbert started Meditation Mondays in 2015 as a follow-up to her Cognitively-Based Compassion Training program, an eight-week course designed to train the mind to respond with compassion. The course is offered in the community twice a year through the
Langbert decided to open Meditation Mondays to more than just graduates of the eight-week program and now hopes to inspire people of all experience levels to meditate more often.

You can think about meditation like working out, she said.

"If you go to Campus Rec to work out once a week, that's good because you're moving your body once a week. But if you really want to see tangible results and be able to sustain a level of stamina and strength over time, you would go more frequently," she said. "There is lots of research that suggests that if we are consistent about our practice of meditation, over time we develop greater ability to sustain our focus and our attention, which I think we're all increasingly challenged with because we have screens everywhere and all these things competing for our attention."

Meditating even when you're not feeling stressed is also important, since it helps provide tools to help manage stress when it does hit, Langbert said.

"Trying to meditate when we're in a stressful situation is a lot like trying to turn off the water when the fire hose is already on you," she said.

Langbert takes turns facilitating Meditation Monday sessions with Jeffrey Schlueter, an administrative associate in the Department of English.

Schlueter took up meditation three years ago when his doctor told him his blood pressure was too high, and that medication may be needed.

"I wanted to find a more natural cure," he said.

Schlueter said meditation helped him reduce his stress and anxiety and get his blood pressure under control.

Meditation might also prove helpful in the workplace for some.

Jeremy Frey, a senior lecturer in the Department of English, has attended Meditation Mondays and frequently meditates on his own. He sometimes starts his English 101 and 102 classes with short meditations, which might lead into writing exercises for his students.

"It helps me in my classroom to manage students, student behavior and the behavior of my own mind," he said. "If you're stressed out, meditation is great medicine."

Other campus meditation resources:

The Little Chapel hosts these additional meditation sessions led by UA employees:

- Schlueter guides a meditation from noon-1 p.m. on Wednesdays.
- Tenney Nathanson, professor of English, leads a meditation from noon-1 p.m. on Mondays and from 6:45-8:30 pm. on the first, third and fifth Tuesdays of the month. He also leads a Zen Buddhist tradition group on Sundays from 3:15-5:30 p.m. in the chapel's library.
- Lynda Zwinger, professor of English, leads a silent mediation on Fridays from 11 a.m.-noon.
Meditation Cats [5], a student club, hold meditations every Wednesday from 7-8:30 p.m. in Room 307 of the Cesar E. Chavez Building.

Campus Health’s Counseling and Psych Services offers Mindful Ambassadors [6], a program in which students trained in mindfulness facilitation visit residence halls, events and classrooms by request to do brief Mindful Moments exercises.

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