

Yoga of Change with Joanna Dunn

Worksheet for making true and lasting change

Use this worksheet to help you create lasting change in your life. Revisit the worksheet every month or two to review and remind yourself. Take on the practices described daily and weekly.

Qualities that will support us in making change

- 1) Willingness and courage to go beyond our comfort zone.
- 2) Quality of self-awareness. Compassionate curiosity toward our inner life.
- 3) Surrender. We cannot fully control change.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Not all questions may resonate with you at this time. Answer those that do and come back to those that do not later. The answer is actually not essential, but rather the question creates an attitude of inquiry that will be helpful in guiding us in change.

What is the change you are looking for or hoping for?

Is there already change happening right now in yourself or in your life?

In what way are you already meeting this change or these changes with compassion, courage and surrender?

If anything were possible, what would you like to see in your life?

What do you want to offer to the world?

What are you willing to let go of?

DEFAULT MIND STATE

The default mind state makes change very difficult on a neurological level, but also on an emotional level.

What aspects of common patterns do you recognize in your own default mind state? See below.

Opinion: Often criticism or noticing what is wrong or lacking as well as creating alternate realities of how things should be.

Time travel: Ruminating on the past. Fantasizing or worrying about the future.

Self-referential processing: Interpreting past, present or future and using it to strengthen a sense of who are.

Social cognition: Thinking about other people and what they might be thinking about you. Or, thinking about people and categorizing or evaluating them. Thinking about them in relationship to you.

In what way do these default mind state patterns contribute to your suffering or isolate you from others?

HOW TO WORK WITH THE DEFAULT MIND STATE

Wisdom traditions and neuroscience both suggest the following to decrease the suffering that the default mind state causes:

- 1) Direct experience. Being present to what is happening right now. Do not push anything away or distract yourself from what is happening. This is the practice of mindfulness.
- 2) The default mind state, although part of the human experience, does not have to be constant. We can opt out through mindfulness practices. The brain and the mind can be trained just like a muscle.
- 3) Practices that bring us into mindful states (such as meditation) help us to recover more quickly from default mind state thinking and reduce our suffering.

SELF-COMPASSION

Learning and practicing Self-Compassion versus Self- Criticism

According to scientific research:

Self Compassion makes for more successful goal setting.

Self Criticism inhibits success. Self criticism reinforces default mind state, causing fight or flight stress response and ultimately feeding depressive states of mind.

Three parts to Self-Compassion (Kristen Neff)

- 1) Mindfulness. See your own stress and suffering. Stay present with it. Acknowledge it.
- 2) Be kind to yourself in the way you might to a loved one going through the same or similar experience.
- 3) Feel that your suffering is part of the common human experience.

Self-kindness is not self-indulgence. Do not self-praise nor self-criticize - both reinforce the default state.

Write a letter of Self-Compassion

Take on this practice regularly - whether intensively for one week or once a month, do this practice regularly to help build self compassion. Remember that building self-compassion will help you to be more successful in meeting you goals.

Choose one thing that is going on in your life today that is creating stress and suffering.

- 1) Write down an understanding of what you are feeling as a letter to yourself. You do not need to describe the whole story, just your thoughts and feelings.
- 2) Acknowledge the desire or need that is underneath the pain or suffering.
- 3) Acknowledge what you might be longing for to meet that desire or need.
- 4) Within the letter, offer yourself a message of common humanity. What would you say to remind yourself that this connects you to all humanity?
- 5) Offer yourself some self-guidance, self-kindness, encouragement or support. It might help here to imagine your future self offering your present self wisdom and love.

Read the letter back to yourself silently or aloud or have a friend read it to you.

CHANGING HABITS

Habits are part of the unconscious brain and essentially make life more efficient.

In order to change habits, we must interrupt or replace unconscious patterns with conscious ones.

Stages of awareness:

- 1) Awareness that this habit creates suffering. Although the habit likely developed as a coping mechanism to address some need, it no longer serves us.
- 2) Mindful mindlessness - We are still engaging in the unconscious pattern but we are aware of it. Important to not be self-critical in this stage as it shuts down the process by taking you into and reinforcing the default state.
- 3) Mindful of initial impulse. When we are in this stage, we have the opportunity to change the trajectory and remind ourselves of our goal.
- 4) Awareness of what triggers the impulse. When we can identify the triggers, we can alter our lives to manage the trigger or avoid it altogether.

For reflection: Self-Awareness

Choose a habit that is creating suffering in your life. Remember a time that you engaged in that habit. Tell a story either from the trigger forward or trace your steps backward. Map out the experience with as much detail as you can. What did the impulse feel like? What did you say to yourself?

Next, acknowledge that this habit or reaction was meant to meet some need. Can you identify the basic survival instinct that this habit was striving to meet?

Reducing stress.

Boosting self esteem.

Seeking approval of others.

Dealing with anxiety or fear.

Filling a hunger.

Avoiding dealing with something you don't want to deal with.

How well is this habit meeting that need?

If this habit were no longer your automatic response to this need, what else might you think, feel or do? How else might you meet this need? What would that be like?

Offer yourself some compassion as you consider that there is nothing wrong with you for trying to meet a common human need.

6) Problem solve how you will overcome this obstacle. Legitimate methods include avoiding or developing an alternate approach (Instead of doing x, I'll go for a walk or call a friend.) or just sitting with the sensations of discomfort. (Visualize this with as much detail as possible.)

Visualization for changing habits and meeting goals

For greatest success, do this visualization every day until your new habit becomes nearly automatic. You may have to come back to this visualization in the future if your old habit comes back (which is normal).

With as much detail as possible, capturing smells, sights, sounds, feelings, thoughts, emotions as best as you can recreate or project them.... You are creating a future memory.

- 1) Take the time to visualize yourself carrying out this action.
- 2) Visualize yourself encountering the obstacle.
- 3) Visualize yourself avoiding or managing the obstacle so that you can carry out the action.

Additional notes to support you in your journey.

Be aware of the pattern of moral licensing. "I've been so good that I can treat myself...." The reward/punishment mindset can work against you.

Do you have a tendency to procrastinate or compromise and say that you will make up for it later? Do you actually make up for it?

Anticipate and accept set backs with compassion. Identify the trigger that caused the set back. Problem solve your approach for the future using the visualization technique above.

"Surfing the urge" - When we are trying to give up an old habit, it can be helpful to observe the urge to engage in the activity. These urges, while we think they will increase exponentially over time until we just can't stand it and give in, the reality is that the urge follows the course of a wave, cresting and eventually falling away.

Ten minute rule. When you first have the urge to engage in a habit you are trying to break, tell yourself that if you still feel the need to do whatever the behavior is, you can do so in ten minutes. Often, simply by delaying the behavior, you allow time to pause and allow the urge to pass.

Heart Rate Variability and Willpower

People who have increased Heart Rate Variability are more likely to stick to their goals. Meditation, gentle yoga, pranayama (specifically Sama Vritti, see below) all increase Heart Rate Variability.

Sama Vritti Breathing

Practice for three or so minutes daily, ideally first thing in the morning before sitting for meditation or journaling. Sama Vritti supports increased heart rate variability which is shown to be correlated to an increase in willpower.

Allow your inhale and your exhale to become even to one another. Slightly lengthen your natural breath. If you feel breathless, stressed or feel rushed to take an inhale, you are lengthening your breath too much. If you feel any sort of stress or anxiety when practicing Sama Vritti, let it go and just observe the movement of your natural breath for three minutes instead.

Resources

Kelly McGonigal, *The Neuroscience of Change*, Audio recording by Sounds True

Kelly McGonigal, [The Willpower Instinct](#)

Kristen Neff, self-compassion.org

Normal Doidge, [The Brain that Changes Itself](#) and [The Brains Way of Healing](#)

Newborn and Waldman, [How God Changes your Brain](#)