

## Mind Over Matter

*Stressed out?  
Think it out*



By Maggie Flynn | CTW FEATURES

Mind over matter is a difficult state to achieve, but according to a new study, meditation might provide some help in getting there.

Research from Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, suggests that 30 minutes of daily meditation may help alleviate the symptoms of anxiety, pain and depression.

This six-month study, led by Johns Hopkins assistant professor Dr. Madhav Goyal, found that those suffering symptoms of anxiety and depression saw “a small but consistent benefit” after an eight-week training program in mindfulness meditation.

The research found that this type of meditation, which focuses precise attention to the present moment, had a tangible effect on symptoms of anxiety and depression, especially those associated with a clinical medical condition.

Dr. Goyal explained that while the study focused on the effect of meditation, it also examined the effectiveness of the meditation on symptoms of anxiety and depression. “We compared it to what other studies have found in similar populations using antidepressants, and the effect is about the same,” he says.

The beneficial results of meditation were consistent even when the study allowed for

the placebo effect, wherein patients feel better because they perceive they are getting help. However more studies will be needed to determine just how powerful the effects of meditation are for those suffering from anxiety and depression.

Goyal says that one of the benefits of using meditation for medical therapy is that there are no side effects. For people who are already on a medical regimen, this opens up the possibility of treatment – as long as they have the time to learn and the willingness to practice.

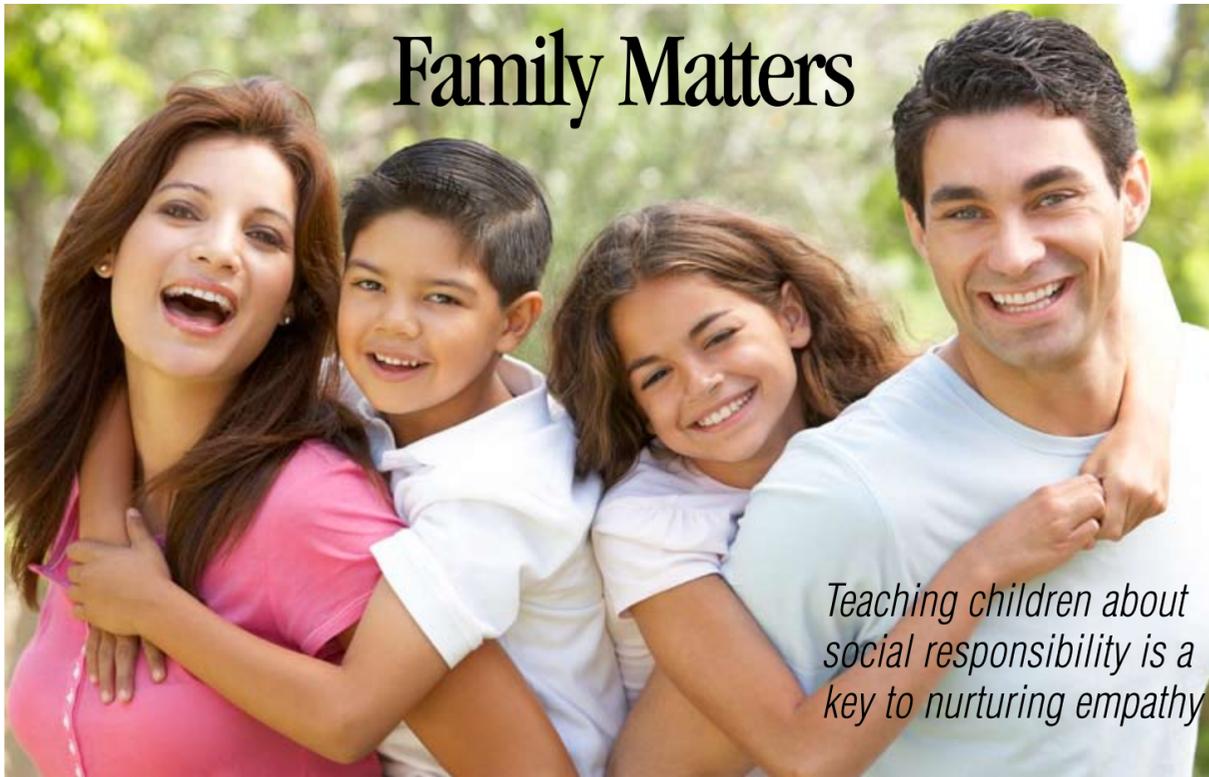
Dr. Goyal stressed the importance of having a good instructor who can teach the appropriate techniques, and cautioned that

while “historically in the eastern traditions from which these programs have evolved, meditation was not seen as a therapy for health problems – it was a means to gain an insight into one’s life.”

But patients from the study’s 47 clinical trials showed consistent improvement over the course of six months. From those results, meditation presents an intriguing option for those dealing with anxiety symptoms. And it’s open to almost everyone.

“I think future studies are needed to determine which patients would respond and which might not,” Dr. Goyal says. “But for the time being, I think anyone who is interested can try it out.” © CTW Features

## Family Matters



*Teaching children about social responsibility is a key to nurturing empathy*

By Bev Bennett | CTW FEATURES

Even at an early age children are listening to parental conversations about people who need help.

Young children may hear about everything from a neighbor who can no longer manage household chores to the Japanese who are trying to rebuild their lives after a major earthquake and tsunami.

As a parent you want to channel this curiosity so your children become empathetic and generous to others, but you may wonder how to develop these characteris-

tics.

Setting a good example is the first and obvious step. But it’s just as important to explain why you’re taking action, say child development experts.

“I think parents should talk to their children about why they’re engaged in those [charitable] behaviors so they know what you’re doing and why,” says Marnie Heister, Ph.D.

“When Dad shovels the walk for a senior, tell the children why and how it makes you feel when you help others,” says Heister,

professor and chair of the department of psychology, Misericordia University, Dallas, Pa.

You can also get involved in charitable activities your children can relate to, show them ways to use their special talents and encourage them to come up with their own ideas, say the experts.

Giving money to a charity may be too abstract for young children.

Instead concentrate on efforts that are easy to grasp and resonate with children, says Judith Myers-Walls, Ph.D., Purdue

Extension Child Development and Family Studies, Purdue University, Lafayette, Ind.

For example, instead of donating to a shelter, help out as a family, providing bag lunches.

If you do make a monetary donation, such as one to the Red Cross, tell your children the ways in which people may benefit from your contribution. Your story makes the gesture more concrete, according to Heister.

Children can make a difference by sharing their skills.

Those who sing or play a musical instrument may enjoy performing at senior centers. Animal lovers can volunteer at shelters (check for age restrictions and parental supervision first). Your computer whiz can help a senior set up a Facebook page.

Be enthusiastic and open to your children’s suggestions as well.

Children who have a say in decisions about how to help others become personally invested in the outcome, which can have lasting benefits.

“We want children to be intrinsically motivated,” says Heister.

Keep in mind that giving to your kids is the best place to start. Children are more apt to be generous if they don’t feel deprived, Myers-Walls says.

“Children need to feel they have enough. If children feel siblings are always taking their stuff, they want to protect them, not share,” Myers-Walls says.

Once you assure your child he is secure, nurture his empathy.

You can point to another child seems lonely or unhappy and suggest that the child may need something.

But don’t tell your child what to do.

“Let the child imagine what he can do to help,” Myers-Walls says.

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