

Self-Regulation Is Your Parenting Superpower
A Mindful Movement Workshop
TRANSCRIPT

Video Link

About Jacqueline Vlietstra:

And now it is my pleasure to introduce you to Jacqueline Vlietstra. Jacqueline became a yoga teacher in 2010 and has specialized in yoga for mental health since 2012. During her years as a yoga instructor at a national eating disorder clinic, and in her classes in addiction recovery treatment, Jacqueline has taught at all levels of care from residential treatment to day programs to specialized outpatient groups. Jacqueline is a certified yoga therapist and a faculty mentor at Yoga North International Soma Yoga Institute. She is now offering online courses and individual yoga therapy through her website, yogaforresilience.com.

Internal check-in:

- You can either close your eyes or you can just let your gaze rest someplace that feels neutral in your space.
- The invitation is to just notice: how do you feel right now?
- Just let that question kind of percolate for a second without any agenda.
- And now let's go to the brain, let's go to the mind and ask the questions:
 - how's your mind right now? Are you present?
 - Are you thinking about your to-do list or something that's else that's on your mind? Do you feel engaged? Do you feel anxious?
 - As you notice what's happening in your mind, see if you can let go of judgements about that. Whatever the thoughts are, let them be.
- Just notice the mental landscape. And then, invite yourself to shift your awareness into your body.
- And just notice, especially if you're feeling emotions like anxiety or depression, excitement, whatever it is that you're feeling, can you notice where and how are those feelings showing up in your body?
- And then, invite your awareness to your breath. Just notice without any effort to change it, just notice the feeling of breathing in and out. No need to control it. Just notice.

Four Invitations for Your Breath:

- breathe in and out through your nose. Now, it's allergy season where I live, so maybe that's not possible if your nose feels stuffed up. So, mouth is fine if you need to.
- Ask, what would it feel like to try to slow your breath down just a little bit? And, what would it feel like to make your breath a little easier? So, when I say easier, think less effort, because sometimes when we pay attention to the breath it gets kind of big. So, what if we just let it be subtle, subtle and effortless?
- what would it feel like to send your breath a little bit lower? And so, if you do have one hand on your chest and one hand on your abdomen, can you let the top hand become a little quieter? And, can you feel the bottom hand move outward as you breathe in and draw in as you breathe out remembering that everything, we're doing is invitation, a suggestion. Some people will find the breath as a difficult place to start, and if that's the case, then you just let it be. But for others, the breath can be a wonderful way to consciously work with your

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autonomic nervous system. What we're doing right now is subtle breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, and if it is landing well for you, it can be a wonderful way to work with self-regulation.

- Okay, so, you can let your hands relax. Just feel your feet on the floor, the support of the chair beneath you.

Straw breathing:

- breathing in through your nose and then blowing out through your mouth as if you are blowing out through a straw.
- What that straw breathing lengthens and extends the exhale. When we lengthen and extend the exhale, that can be calming to the nervous system.
- Straw breathing is a great back pocket practice. It's there for you when you feel stressed and things are kind of chaotic, maybe you're struggling to connect with your kids, just take a few straw breaths. It's also an easy one to teach to your kids and then it's something that you can do together.

Movements:

The movements that we're doing are really simple and straightforward. You don't need any yoga experience for these at all. If anything feels uncomfortable for you, just skip it and wait for the next movement.

Shake Your Head. *We're just going to very gently, in slow motion, shake our heads "no."*

- As you turn your head side to side, you get to decide how much movement. And notice, does this feel nice to just turn your head, give your neck a break from facing forward? Notice the sensations in your neck.
- Ideally, we want this to feel really welcome, so only doing what feels good, and then come to center and now nod your head in slow motion. As you tilt your chin up, you're going to feel sort of an opening across the front of your throat. And as you drop your head down, you'll feel a nice stretch on the back of your neck, to your comfort.

As you do these movements, you might notice that your mind wanders. That's what minds do. That's okay. When you notice that your mind has wandered, can you just welcome yourself back? That's all. Just come back to your body, back to this practice. No judgements. ***The next movement that we're going to do, so bringing your neck back to centers, we're going to bend our elbows and face our palms up toward the ceiling like we're carrying a tray.*** And then, drawing the elbows back,

[00:23:37] we're going to feel a slight opening across the front of the chest. And then we're going to press the hands forward toward our computer screen and notice this little opening or stretch across the upper back. We're just going to go back and forth like that a couple times. Opening the chest. Opening the upper back. And then up to you, you don't have to turn sideways, I'm just turning sideways so you can see what I'm doing, you could make it a little bit bigger so you could arch your spine as you draw back. And you could round your spine as you reach forward. If you have any back issues, you'll want to stay with that smaller movement. If it is feeling all right to you today, you could just experiment with making the movement a little bit bigger. Notice how this feels as you move

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front to back. Notice that sort of back and forth of the sensation as it goes from one side of your body to the other.

[00:24:49] And then, you can come back to a neutral spine. ***And now, we're going to hinge at the hip creases. If you were to march each one of your legs up and poke your fingers in here in your hip creases, you'll feel where your legs meet your pelvis. We're going to bow forward or hinge forward with a neutral spine.***

And then, come up to seat it. So, this little tick tock forward and up. If you spend a lot of time at your desk for work, then these movements, can be a really nice way to give your body a little bit of a reset. I'm tick tocking forward and up.

Try a couple more times. We have a couple more movements that we're going to do from seated.

[00:26:01] **Rachel Tzinberg:** Somebody asked a quick question. The question was can you do these movements standing also?

[00:26:07] **Jacqueline Vlietstra:** Yes. Thank you for your question. You absolutely can. So, I'm going to stay in the chair for the next two movements, but feel free to stand and maybe I'll just kind of give the options and then I was going to move us all to standing with the option of staying seated. Everything we do can be either or. So, if you were standing for the rounding and arching, you could, you could do this and this, and then that tick tock bowing forward. Okay. So, yes, great question. You can do it either way. And, the next ones we can do either way as well. The next one, think about just ***bring your awareness into your shoulders and draw your shoulders up toward your ears.***

[00:26:53] This is where a lot of us hold tension. Hold your shoulders up here and then slowly with control, let your shoulders melt, melt, melt. You might notice some bumpiness. It might be hard to actually control it. The bumpiness is great information. It tells you that you are holding extra tension there and that your muscles up there actually may have forgotten how to fully release. We'll do these two or three more times and you can move at your own pace.

Staying with that last little bit of release at the end. And then for the final one, when you get to the bottom of that release, pause and just notice is there any more softening that could happen in your shoulders? Even if you think you're already fully released, sometimes you might get a little pleasant surprise there.

[00:28:11] Our final seated practice, and in a minute, I'll get up and show you how to do it standing, because it is a really awesome practice to do standing as well. ***Our final seated practice is to put your palms down on your lap*** and slide one hand back towards your hip crease and the other hand toward your knee. And, let that hand movement gently draw you into a spinal twist. Use your own knowledge of your body if you have back injuries, if you have severe osteoporosis, you want to be really thoughtful and careful about these movements and do them only to your comfort if your back is happy and healthy right now.

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Maybe you want to move into a little bit bigger twist. Now, we're not ever going to crank ourselves back. We want to use the muscles of the trunk to help move us into this twist. We're not using our arms to pull us into the twist. Now, as you move into this twist, try looking back over your back shoulder just to your comfort. So, twists are really grounding to our nervous system. You might even invite the image of ringing out stress from your body and your mind, like ringing out water from a sponge. So, I'm going to move to a standing version of this. Keep up the seated if the seated is feeling good for you. If you're standing, you're just going to gently take your arm side to side. So, you could imagine your, your like seaweed in the ocean. You can see that my opposite leg is kind of moving. You don't have to do that, but I'm kind of ready to move. So how about this? For those who want to move into standing, and you can, as I said, you can stay seated if you want, but if you're ready to move into standing, you could come up now and just do this nice twist in a standing version. Now, we were looking over our back shoulder, but there's another way to do this, which is to look over your front shoulder. And so, we're differentiating the movement of the head from the movement of the torso. It adds a little complexity. It's also really nice for those of us who do spend a lot of time sitting at our computers to bring a little freedom into our bodies.

[00:30:50] Good. Go ahead and come back to stillness. And just let your arms hang for a minute and I'd like to invite you to come back to that internal check-in. It might be really interesting to notice has anything shifted for you since the very beginning? And again, we were looking at our minds. We were noticing tension, ease, and other sensations in our bodies.

And, we were noticing our breath, so you could just observe. Does anything feel different? No agenda, just curiosity.

[00:31:46] And then, **take your feet just a little bit wider than hip distance apart. This can be done seated in your chair as well. We're going to rock side to side.** Working with balance is a really helpful way to regulate the nervous system. What I'd like to do when I'm doing this rocking practice is to invite people to move to the comfortable edge of your balance. So, just as you're leaning over to one side and maybe you're starting to feel a little wobbly and then come back through center. And feel that moment, that split second, when you're equally balanced on both feet, or if you're on your chair, then both sitting bones, and then go ahead and rock in the other direction.

You can play around with this. You might eventually lift one foot off the floor. If you're like me and you are in a tiny attic space, you might have a lot of low walls you could lean on. Or, you might want your chair to help you with balance, but you don't need to go too far into the lean. You just want to experience that shift of your center of gravity, that sense of coming back to the center and then moving away from your center once again. And we'll do this just a couple more times in each direction.

And then, come back to center and feel both of your feet on the floor and maybe just invite the image of a snow globe. You know how when a snow globe gets shaken, all that glitter swirls around, and then when you stop shaking the snow globe, all of the glitter settles to the bottom. And so, you could sort of hold that image if it's useful to you and feel your whole self settling here in what in yoga is known as Tadasana or mountain pose. This feeling of being anchored on the earth.

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[00:33:56] **Mountain pose is a great grounding pose.** So simple just standing on your feet, but it's standing with attention and awareness. If this feels like a really nice place for you, you could stay here and you don't even have to do our next practice. But, if you are wanting to incorporate some more vigorous movement right now, I'm going to invite you to try what's called Spandana.

[00:34:21] You can start by shaking your hands and then get as vigorous as you like with that shaking. Now, it could stay just in your hands, or you could let your hands hang and start shaking your whole body. Let it filter through your system, what feels good. If you're shaking your body, you could even do a little rocking or movement, or you could stay facing forward. Here's a little experiment for you. If you're feeling agitated, stressed, anxious in general today, you might slow the shaking down. And just notice what it feels like to be slower. If on the other hand, you're feeling stuck or lethargic or down or depressed, what does it feel like to be quicker? Even if you're feeling pretty neutral today, you could try both and just notice how each one feels for you and maybe the sensation will tell you what you need.

And then we're just going to slowly, whenever each of us is ready and you get to just be your own guide here, we'll come back to stillness when we're ready. And then pause and notice the echo of that Spandana through your system. Maybe your heart is beating a little faster. Maybe just feel this sense of energy moving through your body.

[00:35:55] We're going to do another practice now that involves rhythm. And for this one, I'm going to get a little closer, so I'm going to bring my chair back. But you can stay standing or sit, whatever you prefer. **And the invitation is to cross your wrists over the center of your chest and let your hands be just below your collarbones.** We're just going to tap one hand in the other, an alternating rhythm. And let's use that same invitation that we just used for the Spandana practice. So, if you like, you might try to get a little faster. Notice how that feels in your system. For me that feels a little fast. It makes me feel a little anxious and so I'm going to slow it down. And that's really grounding for me, is to have this nice rhythmic back and forth. But everybody's different. For other people you might need that extra energy.

This is another really nice little pocket practice. This is back and forth and one of the things that we know from the science of nervous system regulation is that synchronized movement can be co-regulating.

If it feels like something you'd like to try, you could match your pace to mine. I'm going to get even a little closer and we could just do this together. Could close your eyes if you like, once you've got that rhythm, and then when you feel complete with this practice, you could just let your hands rest here. Just feel your breath. Maybe you can feel your heartbeat.

[00:38:20] I'm going to do one more standing practice that you can also do seated. And, this is going to weave together movement and breath. **We're going to bring our hands together in front of us. This is known as heart center in yoga. And then we're going to sweep our arms up.** Now, depending on your shoulders, you might want to keep your arms low if you have any shoulder issues or pain. If it feels okay, you could take your arms overhead. And then once your arms get up to whatever height

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they're going to go, just bend your elbows and bring your hands down as if you're sort of smoothing the air in front of you down. If you were not taking your arms over head, it would look like this. You'd take your arms out to the sides and then hands down. Okay? So, choose for yourself. And now, as we do this movement, we're going to feel what it would feel like to synchronize breath and movement. If you like, you can inhale as your arms go up and exhale as your arms come down.

And, we can just flow with our breath. Let the breath be the leader and the movement follow. If based on the last couple of practices, you are sensing that you need more energizing, then take a little extra time with sweeping your arms overhead. Our inhales are energizing. If it feels like you need more settling, more grounding, more calming, then you can take a little more time with your exhales.

We'll do two more like this. If you prefer to stay standing, feel free to do that. I'm going to come back to my seat. Now would be a good time to come back to seated, if that is your preference.

[00:41:16] So, we've worked with awareness, we've worked with breath, we've worked with movement. We haven't done a ton of touch, although we did do the little butterfly tapping. Another touch practice, because touch is also very grounding and regulating is to take opposite arms with your hands. ***Bring your hands around the sides of your arms. You can cross your elbows and you know; it could be opposite elbows; it could be opposite shoulders. Whatever feels comfortable to you. And, settle here for a moment,*** can always release if you prefer. This can feel pretty grounding. Interesting thing about touch is that even though mentally I know these are my hands that are hugging my arms, my nervous system doesn't really get that. So, my nervous system can perceive this as a hug, it can perceive this as safety. I'm just using touch now for a really easy form of self-regulation. And, you know, if movement was resonating for you, you could come even back to that little rocking. Or, if you are finding, nope, stillness is really nourishing me today, then you could be still.

[00:42:47] When you're ready, you can let your arms relax. And we're going to do a breathing practice called ***Bhramari Breath, also known as Bee breath.*** And you're going to inhale through your nose and then you're going to exhale and make a humming sound. And I don't know why this is, but sometimes when I do this on camera, the sound cuts out and it sounds like I've stopped. The invitation is to do it for the full length of your exhale. So, I'll start us off and then of course, you can move at your own pace, but I'll just inhale through my nose.

Hmm.

Two more like this on your own. The sound of our own calm voice is grounding to us as well, is self-regulating. It's also regulating to others. And, as you move through the last one, see if you can really feel the vibration of that hum through your throat, your chest, your head. When you're finished with that last hum, stay with the sensation of the vibration. Can you feel it still? That little echo of vibration moving through your body and notice how did that practice land for you?

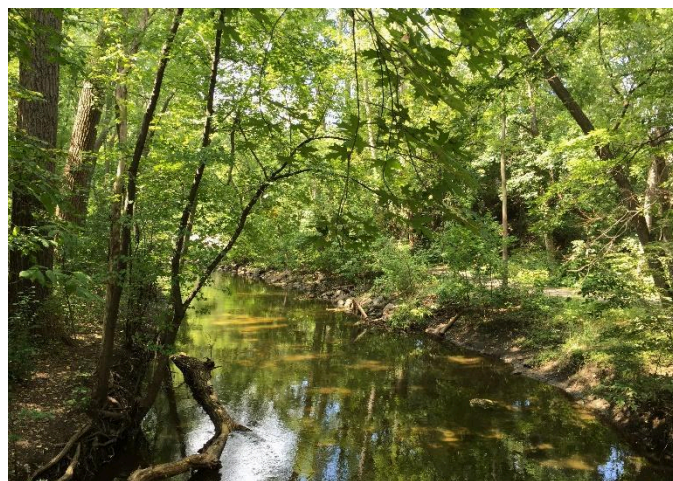
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[00:44:56] ***Our last touch practice is going to be a little bit of self massage.*** And, what I'll invite you to do is, I'm not going to do it because I don't want to dislodge my earbuds, take a finger or two and rub up and down right in front of your ears, that space just in front of your ears.

You choose the pressure and the pace. Then go around behind your ears and just behind your ear lobes, there's that bony part right behind your ear. Lobes rub up and down there. Now, use your thumb and your fingers to massage the outer ear. You're going to take your fingers to the top of the cartilage of your ear and to your comfort rub all around the outside of your ear and then down to your ear lobes. You can also do your temples; you can do the base of your skull right behind where your neck meets your skull. It's a really nice spot. Also, above and below the collarbones is another nice one.

[00:46:20] So, touch is a really nice form of self-regulation, very nurturing. And then, let your hands go when you're ready and just notice how you feel. Take a little check-in. How have these practices been landing with you?

[00:46:42] And then, someone's going to put up a picture because ***nature is grounding for us as well.*** And I have a picture that I wanted to share with you. It's from it's from my neighborhood where I live in Minneapolis and it's Minnehaha Creek in, I believe June. And I took that picture when I was walking my dog. And you can just let your eyes kind of rest in that space. You can imagine the quiet ripple of the creek. Maybe a slight rustle of a gentle breeze in the beautiful green leaves.



[00:47:43] Maybe imagine your feet on the earth,

[00:47:53] the cool summer air on your skin.

[00:48:17] If this picture is, if you find that it is self-regulating to you, and you can stay with your gaze on the picture for the next couple of minutes. If not, or if you are ready to close your eyes, we're going to do just a couple more minutes of a



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little bit of guided practice. So, up to you if you want to look at the photo or turn your attention inward.

[00:48:54] I'd like to invite you back to that initial scan that we did and that we've repeated throughout our practice this opportunity to check in with yourself. For those who weren't here at the very beginning, I shared a statistic, which is that through our Vagus Nerve, which regulates our autonomic nervous system, there are messages going from the brain to the body and from the body to the brain, and that 80% of the communication is actually going from our bodies to our brains, which means that our bodies, the state of our internal organs and our blood pressure and our heart are driving what's happening in our minds.

Eighty percent of that information is going body to brain, only 20% from brain to body. Can you start to build some real agency in caring well for your nervous system by simply tuning into your body as it is right now? No judgment. Nothing needs to be anything other than what it is. If you're feeling not well regulated in this moment, that's okay. It's not comfortable, but it's okay. You don't need to do anything to fix it. Can you let go of the story, the narrative that your brain is creating about these sensations that are actually originating in your body? And just let the thoughts be, even for a moment, let your body be your guide.

Co-Regulation Discussion

[00:51:39] Okay, go ahead and blink your eyes open if your eyes are closed.

I want to take some time to discuss co-regulation. My hope from today's practice is that you got an opportunity to experience some awareness of self-regulation. As I said at the beginning, nobody stays regulated all the time. That isn't even the goal. The goal is to be able to discern when, from our awareness of our physical state and our mental state, but especially our physical state, to discern when we are moving into dysregulation or when we have moved into dysregulation, and then be strategic about bringing ourselves back. We can't always control it. We're exerting influence over our nervous system, but it isn't a switch that we get to flip on or off. We're just learning to be skillful through awareness. Once we have a baseline of feeling, "Okay, I have some agency here. I know how to bring myself into greater regulation," we can use that effectively to co-regulate with our children. *I want to make sure to say that co-regulation is not pretending everything's fine when it isn't. It's not just putting a nice face on things. If that is a strategy that was used with you when you were a child, if that's a strategy that you have found yourself using with your kids, it's something to be curious about and something to work with.*

[00:53:30] ***The most important way that you can co-regulate with your kid is being authentic and listening to them.*** You know, you're offering signals from your nervous system, but it's so important to listen and listening is different from hearing. Listening is paying attention. It's being attuned and it's acknowledging what they are sharing with you. So, just zooming back out into the science of nervous system regulation, *the key ways that we co-regulate are through our facial expressions and through our voices.* And so, I want to just take a minute with those, especially the top half of the face, our eyes. When someone smiles, but they don't smile with their eyes and you can kind of tell it's not

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a real smile, even if your brain is not really thinking that way, your nervous system is not perceiving safety from that person. What we want to make sure that we're doing with our kids to co-regulate is to make sure that we're making eye contact. My kids, I said earlier are 21 and 25, so, they were young children before the proliferation of cell phones. I didn't have a laptop computer; I didn't have a smartphone. I had a dumb phone, but I didn't have a smartphone. And so, I didn't spend a lot of time looking at screens. Most parents didn't, there just wasn't that opportunity. And as, many things as technology have given us, I often feel for parents whose kids are coming of age now in this age of screens and recognizing that there's such a pull for us to engage with our screens and that can come at a cost for how we're engaging with our kids.

So, I would say, in terms of strategies for co-regulation around your home, I think it's really important to put your phone down when you're talking to your kids and nobody's perfect. Remember the 30% rule, you only have to get right 30% of the time. So, this isn't to shame anybody, but it's just a gentle reminder to say that they need to see your eyes and they need to see that your eyes are really engaged.

[00:55:46] *There's a softness around your eyes when you are projecting safety. Your voice. Somebody whose voice, it's known as prosy, that someone whose voice is modulated and calm has a calming influence on other people. If your voice is angry, if your voice is shrill, if your voice is really low and your kind of down, all of those things, on a subconscious level are being picked up by other nervous systems. So, it's just something to keep in mind is that when you're talking to your kid, for example, I used to be in the habit of shouting from one room to another, "Hey, kids, can you." It's not that I would never do that now, but, I'm more conscious of if I want someone's attention and if I want to connect with them, I walk into the other room. I don't shout anymore, not at least not very much. My kids would tell you I'm not perfect at this by any means. And that, really isn't the goal.*

Touch, we worked on touch in our self-regulation practice, so I hope that you felt that influence of nurturing gentle touch on your own body. Well, we need to offer that to our children as well. And my observation, having older kids, is that it's much more natural and much easier when our kids are little. So, if you have little kids, you can just pull them onto your lap and you can maybe carry them. My son is six feet tall. I can't carry him. He doesn't really fit on my lap anymore. But I have become really aware of making sure to offer my adult kids touch. When I see them, I give them a hug. I don't just say hi from across the room. I come over and I make sure to make physical contact with them. We, as humans need touch and little kids get it more easily just because of their compact size. Our teens, they get kind of prickly and maybe they don't seem like they want it. So, it's always good to ask. When my kids were in those middle years, I would ask, I wouldn't just grab them. But more often than not, if someone's feeling down and my impulse might be to move into how can we fix this; but I remind myself I just need to offer a hug. And, almost every time they say yes, I want a hug. So, touch is really important. It's really important to remember that nervous system regulation works both ways.

[00:58:14] *We are the primary regulators for our kids, but they influence our nervous systems as well. And you can imagine within a family, you've got multiple people influencing each other. What you might notice is that you feel like you're in a fine mood until your kid comes home and does X, Y, and Z and then suddenly you're really mad or you're really frustrated or you're really distressed and it's*

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*okay to recognize that your kids' nervous systems will impact yours. That is how we are wired. **The point that I want you to take away though is that because you are an adult and your nervous system is fully formed and theirs is not, that you are in a position to help shift this back and forth.***

So, if you are in a pattern in your household where, there's conflict and there's a sense that things are not going well, or you're maybe in a negative pattern, that you can look to your own nervous system to help break that chain. It's not blame yourself if things are going wrong. It's an opportunity really for you to step back and say, "Okay, what's happening in my body right now? And how can I help bring myself into regulation so that I can shift this narrative?"

Q&A

[00:59:37] **Rachel Tzinberg:** How much time do I need to spend doing these exercises and does the order matter? I will just expound from there, like, can I do it for five minutes? Does it matter if I do it for two minutes, 10 minutes? Obviously more benefit the longer I practice it, right?

Jacqueline Vlietstra: The more you do, the more you will benefit from the practices. And yes, there's no, set rule of, oh, you have to do it a certain amount of time. I would love to just say, weave it into your daily life. You don't need to set it aside as like, I'm going to add this to my calendar, because then it just becomes another thing on your to-do list. Whereas if you can just say, okay, one minute here, five minutes here. Did you notice in our practice how we just checked in with ourselves from time to time? So, that's an opportunity to notice what's happening, that checking in with yourself and noticing, what do I need right now? What would feel helpful to me? I would just say, do it as much as you can. It really becomes just a part of your awareness, a part of your daily life. It's not really a to-do. And the order doesn't matter. I just scratched the surface on things that you can do. I should point out, I'm offering a drop-in class on Wednesdays at noon, so if you're looking for more resources you can go to my [website](#) and sign up to come to class.

[01:01:02] **Rachel Tzinberg:** Jacqueline, thank you so much. This was incredible. It was such a pleasure. Thank you so much.

[01:01:07] **Jacqueline Vlietstra:** Thank you so much.

[01:01:09] **Rachel Tzinberg:** Try to implement this into our real lives. Thank you everybody for joining us today. In May, it's Mental Health Awareness Month, and we are celebrating with a number of different programs. We look forward to seeing you. We hope that you'll join us for as many as you are able to join us for. And again, Jacqueline Namaste. Thank you so much.