

CREATING SERENITY WITH STRESS MANAGEMENT

by Sue Neufeld-Ellis, LMHC, CSAT, RN

In writing this article on Stress Management I thought to myself, "What can I write about that is meaningful to CSATS?"

All of you are seasoned professionals who probably teach stress management techniques to your clients in one form or another. What came up for me was "Remembering." I've taught stress management and meditation for more than 15 years and yet, I occasionally attend a meditation workshop to be "reminded" and "remember." Gaining different perspectives is good.

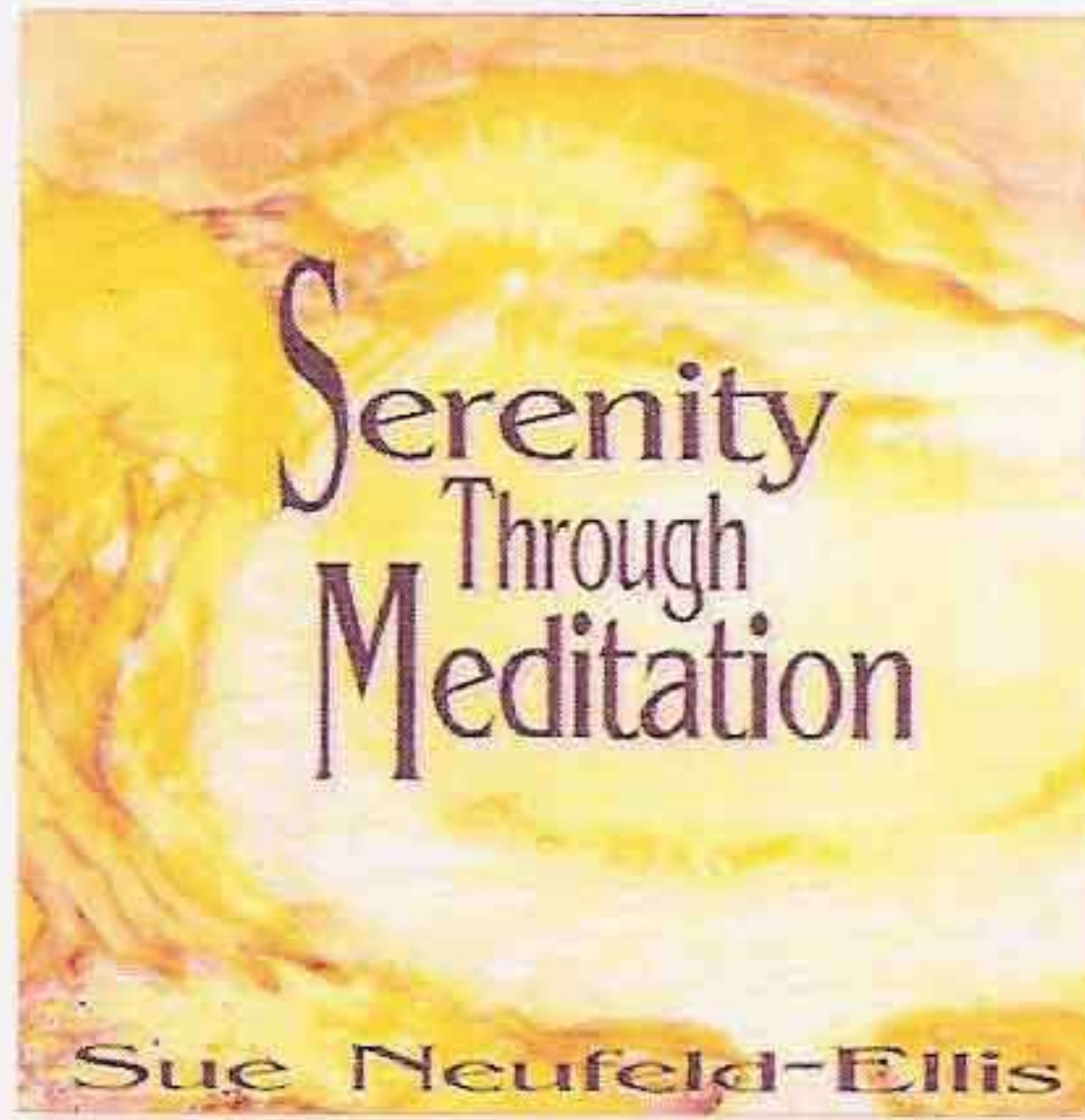
Most of us work at balancing our personal and professional lives: family; couple relationship; children; clients; health (nutrition & exercise); spiritual life; daily chores and tasks; much less fun, R&R, and downtime! We often forget to stop, look at our life, and ask ourselves, "Where is my life out of balance?" "What am I willing to commit to?... to nurture and take care of myself?" I sometimes enlist an accountability partner for support in following through on my commitment to myself. I can get so busy that I put other things in front of the commitment to myself.

It is also important for us to watch for signs of Secondary or Vicarious Trauma, particularly with the client population with whom we work. It can be dealt with through supervision, group consultation, or personal counseling.

I would guess a majority of us chose this field of work, not only to make a positive, healing difference in the world, but also out of inconsistency and dysfunction in our family of origin. We might have issues of "doing" to feel good about ourselves; helping

others to divert from our own pain or problems, and thinking and/or feeling we don't deserve to nurture and take GOOD care of ourselves. If any of this resonates with you, join the club... we all are a "work in progress."

Included below is a handout I use for my meditation and stress management classes. You can use it by having your clients (or yourself!) commit to doing one thing on the list and return to the next session being accountable regarding how it went, and what came up. I hope



these "Tips" will be helpful to both you and your clients.

Remember to Take Care

1. **Women:** Take a hot bath with lavender oils (if not allergic) and candles for a minimum of 20-30 minutes. They are proven to relax your brain and body.
Men: Hot shower water on your shoulders and neck will relax your muscles.
2. Write "exercise" into your daily book as a regularly scheduled appointment. A minimum of 30 minutes three times a week. A brisk walk, aerobics, swimming or any exercise you can enjoy (or learn to enjoy) that raises

your heart rate. Remember how you feel afterward.

3. Before you go to sleep at night, write down five things you are grateful for and put the list under your pillow.
4. Cuddle/pet/play with your animal.
5. Cuddle/play with your child, spouse, partner or friend, only doing something fun. Let your "inner child" play, too.
6. Buy a teddy bear or stuffed animal.
7. Call someone you like or love, and have no or little conflict with, and connect.
8. Let your creativity out! Woodwork, make candles or jewelry, tinker on the car or motorcycle, draw, paint, make a collage that totally expresses who you are.
9. Garden or be in nature. Many people, especially men, connect with their spirituality or inner self by being in nature. Hiking, skiing, climbing, vegetable gardening, growing flowers and plants, boating, sailing. Commit!
10. Take up a new sport or hobby that you always said you wanted to do, but haven't. Commit and have fun! What is life if you are not having fun? (Mine is sailing).
11. Rent or see a comedy or funny movie or play. Laughter is the best medicine.
12. Read a good book of interest, not related to your work.
13. Allow yourself to take a nap and not feel guilty.
14. Wear something comfortable that you totally like, or dress up looking awesome!

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15. Surprise somebody you love and really enjoy it!
16. Snuggle on the couch, under a blanket, in front of a fire reading a good book or magazine you really like and can get lost in.
17. Don't do one thing you compulsively feel you have to do on the weekend, and for the procrastinators, do one thing on your mentally obsessive list. Only one!
18. For one day, practice being in the moment. When you become conscious of being in the past or future, bring your body back to your center as though you had "stepped out of life" back to the present moment. Continue to practice this one day at a time for the rest of your life.
19. When you find yourself in frustrating traffic (road rage?) take in one, long, deep breath, and do an inner smile as you exhale.
20. Throw/give one thing away a week for seven weeks – or longer if you like it!
21. Practice and then say "no" to any more commitments for one month, just to see how it feels. If it feels good, do it!
22. Conversely, say "yes" to let go of some commitments for one month. If it feels good, do it!
23. In between, if someone asks you to take something new on say, "Can I get back to you on that?" to give yourself some time to assess. Unless it's an emergency, 99% of the time we can buy time to assess or get trusted feedback from others.
24. Write in a journal. It is a wonderful place to express yourself freely. Thoughts, feelings, goals, dreams, pros, cons.
25. Do an act of kindness. Especially to someone you don't like or who irritates you.



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