



SUPERHERO IRL

INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS

BY DR. JANINA SCARLET

Do you ever worry about the future? Do you worry about what someone will think about you or how things will turn out?

Is there anything you need right now, such as food, rest, sleep, a moment to yourself, a hug, or some time to decompress?

Most of us spend so much time worrying about the future or being upset about the past that we forget to notice what is actually happening *right now* in the present moment. It's almost like we have a malfunctioning time machine (or a T.A.R.D.I.S. from *Doctor Who*) that only flies us to the times of our biggest regrets and to the biggest nightmares of our imagined future.

So, how can we combat this way of thinking? We can practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness means paying attention to what is going on in the present moment, meaning right now. It means noticing how you are feeling right now. It means noticing if you feel anxious, tense, tired, or hungry.

Mindfulness also means noticing if you're holding your breath from anxiety or are tensing your shoulders. It also means noticing what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.

Mindfulness as a Powerful Superpower

You may have noticed that superheroes like Spider-Man and the Jedi Knights from *Star Wars* have to be in touch with their senses to be able to use their powers.

For example, when Peter Parker became Spider-Man, his sense of sight, hearing, and smell became stronger. These are his *spidey senses*.

Similarly, in *Star Wars*, the Jedi Knights practice connecting with the Force. The Force is the energy all around us and connecting with this energy allows the Jedi Knights to use the Force to become stronger and to be able to better manage any threats or anxiety.

Essentially, both the Jedi and Spider-Man are practicing mindfulness. They are using mindfulness as a kind of Superpower.

While Spider-Man and the Jedi are fictional heroes, the principle holds true for you – through mindfulness you can tap into strength and capabilities you may not know you have.

So how does mindfulness work?

The goal of mindfulness is to purposely focus on what you are feeling, thinking, doing, as well as touching, smelling, tasting, seeing, or hearing. The idea of mindfulness is to notice what you are experiencing right here, right now.

For example, take a few seconds to look around your room. Notice 5 objects that you can see and either write them down or draw them:



Now, take a few seconds to notice what you can hear (if you are able to hear) and write down or draw what you are able to hear:



Now, take a few moments to take 5 slow breaths. Don't rush yourself. Take as much time as you need. You don't need to force your breath or take big deep breaths. See if you can just take 5 slow, easy, effortless breaths on your own time in your own way. Write down or draw your experience:

Mindfulness as a way to slow down time.

So often we might feel as if we exist in the middle of chaos, having to rush everywhere, never having enough time. It's not that time actually goes faster when we are busy; it is that our perception of time changes when we are rushing. Mindfulness is a way to slow down our body, which can slow everything else down too.

So, when you feel rushed, overwhelmed, and anxious, when it feels like you have no time to breathe, STOP and take 5 slow breaths to slow down the chaos. See if you can practice it regularly, every hour perhaps, or every few hours.

Like Spider-Man, Rey, or Luke Skywalker, we too can practice mindfulness. This practice is not meant to get rid of our anxiety, but rather it is meant to slow things down so that we can be better equipped to deal with anxiety.

Give it a try and may the Force be with you.

MEET THE DOCTOR

Dr. Janina Scarlet is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, author, and a full-time geek. A Ukrainian-born refugee, she survived Chernobyl radiation and persecution.

She immigrated to the United States at the age of 12 with her family and later, inspired by the *X-Men*, developed Superhero Therapy to help patients with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Superhero Therapy refers to incorporating popular culture examples into evidence-based therapy to help the client to become the hero of their own journey. Dr. Scarlet is the recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award by the United Nations Association for her work on Superhero Therapy.

Dr. Scarlet's work has been featured on Yahoo, BBC, NPR, Sunday Times, CNN, CW, ABC, Huffington Post, The New York Times, Forbes, the Nerdist, BuzzFeed, Bleeding Cool, CNET, Mugglenet, LADbible, and many other outlets. She currently works at the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management in San Diego and has authored *Superhero Therapy*, *Harry Potter Therapy*, *Therapy Quest*, *Dark Agents*, *Super-Women*, as well as numerous contributions to *Star Wars Psychology*, *Star Trek Psychology*, *Wonder Woman Psychology*, *Supernatural Psychology* and many other books.

Founded in 2013, SuperheroIRL is a project of Pop Culture Hero Coalition, the first 501c-3 non-profit to use relatable stories from TV, comics, and film, to develop tools for living, including conflict resolution, resilience, empathy, and other crucial mental health skills.

Created by pop-culture-fluent clinical psychologists and educators, our work is in schools, comic cons, children's hospitals – and homes in the age of COVID-19.

www.PopCultureHero.org

For info and requests, please email **info@PopCultureHero.org**

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