



SUPERHERO IRL

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

BY DR. JANINA SCARLET

Many people use mindfulness to reach their highest potential and get in touch with their own personal superpower or Jedi ability. This includes many of our heroes, like Yoda, Spider-Man, Batman, Black Panther, Black Widow, and Wonder Woman.

Having some mindfulness time in your day can help you feel calmer and more focused on what's important to you — what you want and what you may need to do.

Scientists are learning that mindfulness can help people improve their physical *and* mental health, including dealing with stress, anxiety, anger, depression, and pain.

Practicing mindfulness has also been shown to improve people's concentration, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Most people think that in order to practice mindfulness, you have to completely clear your mind of all thoughts or to be able to be fully focused.

That is not the case. In fact, it is not possible to completely clear your mind of all thoughts because our brains were not designed to function that way. Instead, mindfulness is a way of paying attention to one activity at a time at a slow pace, without rushing. For example, mindfulness could mean brushing your teeth slowly and just noticing all the sensations of brushing your teeth.

Any activity can become a mindfulness practice. Eating your favorite food, drinking your favorite beverage, drawing, coloring, reading, or listening to music.

With each of these activities, imagine yourself training to become a Jedi, a witch or a wizard like Harry Potter or Hermione, or a superhero.

Let's do a brief mindfulness practice now. Imagine yourself tuning into your senses to sharpen them, to slow down time, to give you an ability to become more resilient even in the face of the hardest of times.

As we are practicing, you will notice yourself getting distracted and thinking about other things.

This is completely normal.

When you notice that you are getting distracted, take a breath and refocus on this exercise. To begin, I would like to invite you take a few slow breaths.

Notice the sensation of your feet as they are making contact with the ground or your couch.

Notice that at this very moment, you are not in a rush to get anywhere.

You are not late for anything

You are here, in this room, in this moment, exactly where you need to be, doing exactly what you should be doing.

So, for a few moments, remove the burden off of your shoulders.

At any time, now or in the future, if you get distracted or overwhelmed, gently ask yourself, “where are my feet?” to bring you back to the present moment.

Now, taking a few moments to activate your Jedi powers, your magical abilities, your spidey senses, place your hands on your heart center and take three slow breaths.

Now, bring your attention to your senses, notice the sounds around you.

Now notice the temperature of the room.

Notice if you are breathing or if you are holding your breath.

Notice if you are tensing your shoulders.

Just take a few slow breaths here to slow down and stay with these sensations and breathe.

Now, once again bring your attention to the sensation of your feet. If the sensation of your feet is not available to you, see if you can focus on the sensation of your hands, or the sensation of your lips instead.

Thank you for taking a few minutes today to practice being mindful and get in touch with your inner superpowers.

See if you can take some time throughout the next week to practice mindfulness.

Here are some other examples of mindfulness activities:

- Mindful eating
- Mindful showering
- Mindful listening to music
- Brushing teeth mindfully
- Practicing mindfulness while walking
- Practicing mindfulness while taking a test
- Mindfully doing the dishes
- Mindfully brushing your hair
- Coloring or creating artwork

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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