



# SNAP! From Chaos to Calm

Workshop handouts

Created by Julie Potiker, Mindful Methods for Life, LLC





Certified Mindful Self-Compassion Teacher and author of "SNAP! From Chaos to Clam" and "Life Falls Apart But You Don't Have To: mindful methods for staying calm in the midst of chaos," Julie Potiker brings her years of experience integrating multiple trainings to her Mindful Methods For Life courses and workshops, to help others bring more peace and wellness into their lives. Her programs are taught in a style that is easy, fun, accessible and applicable to everyday life. Her unique, often irreverent approach earns consistent praise from students -- from stressed out Moms to corporate moguls.

During COVID-19 shelter-in-place, Julie added the following teacher trainings: David Treleaven's Advanced Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness, the Mindful Self-Compassion Adaptation for Healthcare Communities and the Mindful Self-Compassion short course for teaching online during the pandemic. Julie holds a B.G.S. from the University of Michigan and a J.D. from George Washington University.

**[www.mindfulmethodsforlife.com](http://www.mindfulmethodsforlife.com)**

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*Some material adapted from Christopher Germer & Kristin Neff. Mindful Self-Compassion. January 2019.*



## A person with long, dark hair is seen from behind, sitting on a grassy bank and looking out over a body of water. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text "Joy List" is written in a cursive font in the upper right corner.

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## SNAP

**Soothing Touch** – down regulate the stress response

**Name the Emotion** – Name it to tame it. Feel it to heal it.

**Act** – Using one of your Mindfulness in Daily Life Tools from your joy list to change your channel

**Praise** – Yourself, your practice, the universe

### **Soothing Touch Explored as a means of calming down our nervous system when it is activated by real threats, or perceived threats like self-criticism**

- According to Paul Gilbert (who created Compassion-Focused Therapy; Gilbert, 2009), when we criticize ourselves we're tapping into the body's threat-defense system (our reptilian brain). This system evolved so that when we perceive a threat our amygdala gets triggered, we release cortisol and adrenaline, and get ready for fight, flight, or freeze.
- The system works great for protecting against threats to our bodily selves, but nowadays most threats are to our self-concept. When we feel inadequate our self-concept is threatened so we attack the problem – ourselves!
- The threat response causes stress and is related to conditions like anxiety and depression.
- Luckily, we're not just reptiles but are also mammals. The evolutionary change in mammals is that mammalian young are born very immature so have a longer developmental period to adapt to their environment.
- To facilitate this, the mammalian care-giving system evolved so that the infant would keep safe by staying close to the mother. The system is triggered by two main factors – soothing touch and gentle vocalizations (Steller & Keltner, 2014.) **This releases oxytocin and opiates in both parents and children**, helping the infant feel safe and secure.
- When we practice self-compassion, especially with physical gestures of self-compassion, we generate a sense of safety that counteracts the stress generated by the threat-defense system. (Arch et al., 2014; Friis et al., 2016; Petrocchi, Ottaviani & Couyoumdjian, 2016).





## SOOTHING or SUPPORTIVE TOUCH

An easy way to support ourselves when we're feeling badly is to offer ourselves comforting or soothing touch.



### Soothing Touch Exercise:

- When you notice you're under stress take 2-3 deep breaths.
- Gently place a hand over your heart, simply feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand as a supportive gesture.
- If you wish, placing both hands over your heart.
- Feel the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
- Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

Some people feel uneasy putting a hand over the heart. Feel free to explore where on your body a gentle touch is actually soothing. Some other possibilities are:

- Cupping your hand over a fist over your heart
- One hand over your heart and one on your belly
- Two hands on your belly
- One hand on your cheek
- Cradling your face in your hands
- Crossing your arms and giving yourself an embrace
- Gently squeezing or stroking your arms, if you wish
- One hand holding the other
- Cupping your hands in your lap

### Name it to tame it, feel it to heal it. This is the "N" in SNAP.

When we name a difficult emotion, activity in the amygdala (the primitive part of the brain that registers danger) becomes less active and is less likely to trigger a stress reaction in the body. This naming process continues the calming effect of soothing touch, explored above, the first element of the SNAP system.

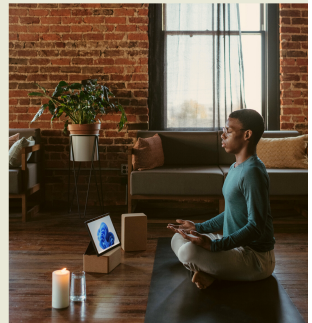
Emotions have physical and mental components – thoughts in your mind, and reactions in your body.



## **ACT - the "A" in SNAP:**

### **This is your toolbox – the first 2 items foundational to SNAP:**

- Soothing Touch. Place your hands on your heart, face, arms, belly, hand in hand to find your soothing touch place. The release of oxytocin and endorphins will help calm your nervous system.
- Name the emotion. Name it to tame it, so that you can feel it to heal it. Naming the emotion engages your thinking brain to help you calm down when you are feeling overwhelmed. After naming the emotion, you can apply one of the many appropriate mindful methods to help you feel better.
- Joy List - Write a list of all the things that bring you joy – keep your Joy List handy!
- Meditate every day. Download the Insight Timer app and The Balanced Mind with Julie Potiker App for free guided meditations. Check out the Calm app or the Headspace app.
- Ask yourself what you need to hear right now?
- Ask yourself what you need to do right now?
- Ground yourself by dropping your attention to the soles of your feet. How do they feel? Warm or cold? Moist or dry?
- Ground yourself by using a here-and-now stone, rosary or mala. Focus your attention on the temperature and texture of the object.
- Connect with other humans, try to see someone who cares about you on zoom or facetime if seeing them in person isn't feasible. A phone call might be enough! Or even a comforting text exchange.
- Bring to mind people who care about you, and people you care about, to help you feel loved and safe.
- Practice calling yourself "sweetheart" or another term of endearment.
- Practice mindfulness while brushing your teeth. Close your eyes and feel and taste the experience.





- Practice mindful cooking. Focus on the colors, textures and aromas of the experience.
- Practice mindful eating. Before you slowly take your first bite, consider the journey the ingredients took from being harvested to making their way to your kitchen. Feel gratitude for all the hands that made that happen.
- Practice mindful walking. Open up your senses to the sights, sounds, temperature, smells, everything you can notice.
- Practice breath techniques that have you breathing longer on the exhale to lower your heart rate and blood pressure.
- Practice taking in the good any time you notice a positive mental state, letting it land for a few breaths so you push the good mental state to a neural trait. More info below!
- Practice letting music help you be in the moment. Make a playlist of songs that move you.
- Journal or write.
- Get out to see things enduring - the sky, trees, water, mountains if nearby, etc. Even looking out the window can help shift your mood and open your perspective.
- Move your body, walk, stretch, exercise.
- Practice Tonglen, the Sending-Receiving Meditation. Instruction can be found on Insight Timer searching my name, or searching Tonglen and experiencing many teachers teaching this ancient practice. I also have Tonglen on the Balanced Mind with Julie Potiker app.
- Practice Loving Kindness Meditation for yourself and others. Search for either Loving Kindness Meditation or Metta Meditation on Insight Timer or the Balanced Mind with Julie Potiker app. I have over a dozen versions of Loving Kindness Meditations on both apps.
- Get enough rest and sleep - guided meditations can help. I recommend Kenneth Soares on Insight Timer for guided meditations for sleep.
- Keep a Gratitude Practice. The positive feedback loop will make you happier. More info below!
- Be of service - in any way possible. Reach out and call someone you know is alone. Give time or donate to organizations that feed and protect the vulnerable among us. This will benefit you with longer lasting eudemonic joy as you help others.

## PRAISE - the "P" in SNAP

Pat yourself on the back - have gratitude for your practice for helping you manage difficult emotions! Praise the universe, praise your deity of choice!



# 2 actions from your tool box to practice daily

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## **TAKING IN THE GOOD: EXPERIENCE DEPENDENT NEUROPLASTICITY**

(Body of work by Rick Hanson, Ph.D)

“Neurons that fire together, wire together.” Donald Hebb

“Where attention goes, energy flows, and neural networks grow.”  
Dan Siegel

When we have a good feeling, let it enrich and absorb for a few breaths so it moves from positive mental state to neural trait in our brain!

Don't waste a good feeling – let it make your brain a happier place!

Example: Instead of “that’s a beautiful sunset, what’s for dinner?” Try, “that’s a beautiful sunset, wow, look at those colors, that’s amazing!” Those few moments of awe make a happy bridge in your brain.



## **GRATITUDE JOURNAL QUESTIONS**

What did I enjoy today?

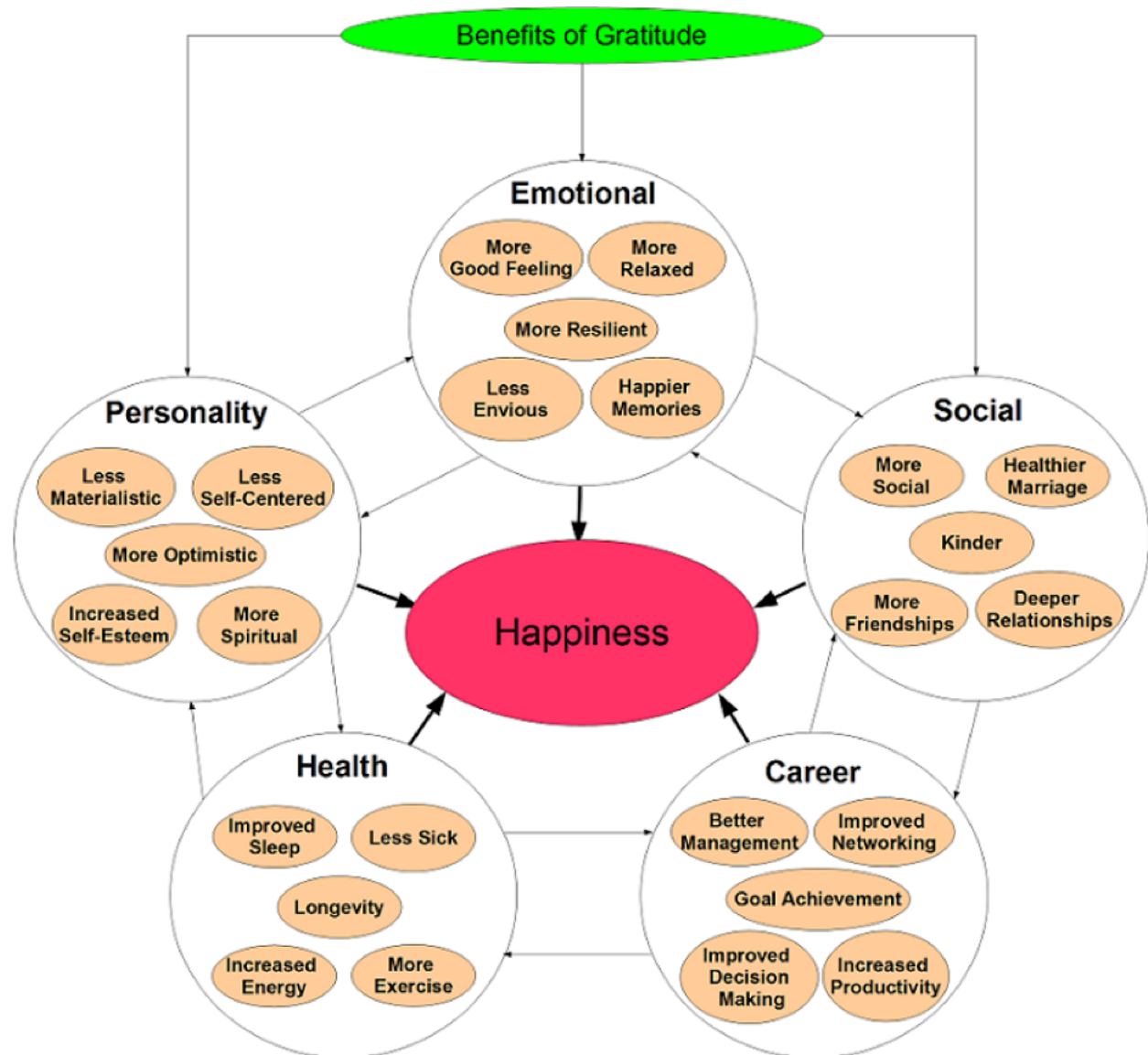
What am I grateful for today?



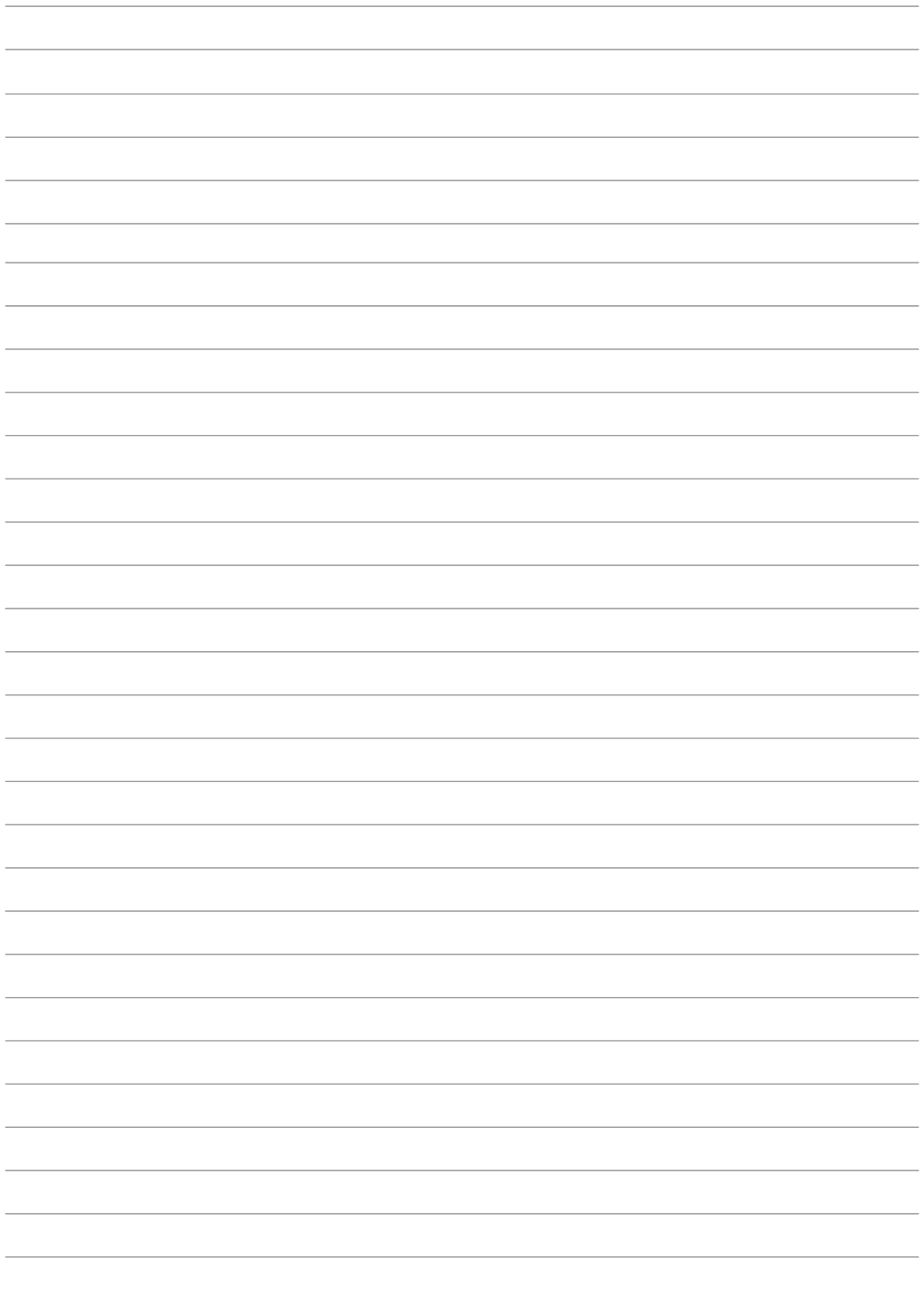
This plays right into taking in the good – you are remembering what felt good and writing it down – gratitude creates an upward spiral of mental health and wellbeing.

You can pull out your gratitude journal and use it as a tool to change your channel when you feel bad, by remembering and then reabsorbing and enriching the memory in your body to use that memory to make another happy bridge – giving you 3 bangs for your buck!

The research on the benefits of keeping a gratitude journal is robust. Here is a compilation of some of the findings:

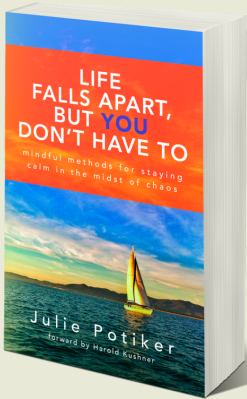






## Books by Julie Potiker

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### **LIFE FALLS APART, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO** **Mindful Methods for Staying Calm in the Midst of Chaos**

Julie Potiker turns some enormous lemons in her life into the sweetest lemonade in this wonderful book. She brings together practical brain science, powerful methods from psychotherapy, and her own friendly, funny, encouraging, and heartfelt voice to offer a wonderful roadmap and toolbox for when life throws some lemons at you.

—**Rick Hanson, PhD.**, author of *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*; and *Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence*.



### **SNAP! From Chaos to Calm**

The SNAP method is brilliant. In one simple practice, Julie Potiker integrates brain science, mindfulness, compassion, and other effective tools for lifting your mood, easing anxiety, calming stress, and opening your heart. Full of practical wisdom, she leads readers through funny stories, tender care, and many different applications of the SNAP method. Throughout, she is a super-smart, encouraging, and hopeful friend.

A wonderful book!

--**Rick Hanson, PhD.**, author of *Resilient: How to Grow and Unshakable Core of Calm, Strength, and Happiness*

This book is a treasure box of practices for nearly any difficult moment you might find yourself in. All variations on the simple yet profound Soothing, Naming, Acting, Praising SNAP! practice developed by the author, each chapter provides examples of how, why, and when you can apply this method to rebalance when you are feeling thrown off. In her authentic, honest, and heartfelt voice, Julie Potiker brings the material to life by sharing how she's applied the practice of SNAP to real-world situations ranging from annoying to crushing. What a gift! I'm off to put sticky notes in my home, car, and workplace to remind me to SNAP...

—**Cassandra Vieten, PhD.**, Director of Research at the Arthur C Clarke Center for Human Imagination at the University of California, San Diego; Executive Director, John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation, and author of *Mindful Motherhood*.



## Advance praise for SNAP! From Chaos to Calm

This book is a handy resource for managing difficult emotions based on the elegant acronym, SNAP. The author, Julie Potiker, generously shares her personal experiences, and even a few poems, to illustrate how mindfulness and self-compassion can help us cope with life's challenges. Rest assured, help is just a snap away!

—**Christopher Germer, PhD.**, Co-developer, Mindful Self-Compassion training; Author, *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*

Life is rarely as easy as a snap, but Julie Potiker finds a relatable way of helping you contend with the most challenging experiences of life by using her clever and easy SNAP method. Tapping into our natural capacity for healing and ease, and building on solid science, Julie leads the reader by the hand with her own brand of humor, warmth and humility into a place of greater wellbeing and joy. Super accessible and incredibly practical, this book will become your best friend in times of need.

—**Steven Hickman, PsyD.**, Licensed Clinical Psychologist; Executive Director, Center for Mindful Self-Compassion; Founding Director, UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness




This book is a delight to read. It's filled with science backed techniques, but you wouldn't know it with Julie Potiker's engaging, humorous, and humble style. I found myself both laughing out loud and with eyes brimming with tears as I followed Julie through her adventures using her clever and effective SNAP method to meet the myriad of challenges that have arisen in her life- as they do for each of us. This book is as entertaining and inspiring as it is helpful. Above all, it is a guide for how build a life when life feels stacked against you. One SNAP at a time.




—**Michelle Becker, M.A., LMFT**; Founder of Wise Compassion Developer of Compassion for Couples training

In this book, Julie Potiker weaves together stories from her own life with poetry and life tips to show how meditation practice can be easy as snap! Whether you are plagued with anxiety, overwhelmed with challenging current events, or simply having a bad day, this easy-to-remember acronym can help remind you to be kind and supportive to yourself – to treat yourself as you would treat a good friend.

—**Karen Bluth, PhD.**, Department of Psychiatry, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Author, *The Self-Compassion Workbook for Teens*, *The Self-Compassionate Teen*, *Mindfulness and Self-Compassion for Teen ADHD*, *Self-Compassion for Girls: A Guide for Parents, Teachers, and Coaches*

## Connect with me

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 Balanced Mind with Julie Potiker  
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