

Day One: Sitting Still

Sitting in the kitchen sipping coffee one morning, I told my husband I was writing a book about calm. He gave me a long thoughtful look. Then he spoke carefully - the way you speak to someone who might easily explode. "Well", he said, "I can think of quite a lot of people who seem calmer than you."

He's right. I am not a very calm person. My family will tell you that I easily lose my temper, often at small things. Plenty of things upset me. I am not a paragon of patience. I have not achieved any sort of buddha-like state. Am I qualified to be writing this at all?

The only reason I can write about finding calm is that I need calm myself. Every single day. The stresses of my life - being mum to a big family, having a disabled child, running a small business - make me ravenous for peace. Finding daily calm is essential to my survival in this crazy world.

My quest for calm has led me on a journey. Along my way I have discovered slow Yoga, meditation, the benefits of nature, Reflexology, gratitude practices and more. Over the last few years I have been sharing some of this toolkit my Yoga and Reflexology clients. This book aims to share more widely some of what I have learned about finding calm.

What happens when I don't make space for calm

When I don't make space for calm, things go wrong. I break things, shout at my children and feel miserable. Unexpected problems send me into a tailspin of angry tears. I catch colds, I make more mistakes, I forget things. Usually the people who suffer most are my family and closest friends. Finding calm is something I owe to myself, my loved ones and the wider community.

Life in a crazy world

Everyone has difficult stuff in their lives. Maybe you have a tough job, health or money worries or tricky relationships. Perhaps you just struggle with anxiety for no obvious reason. Often it seems as if the world has gone crazy. I can't make that stuff go away, but I hope this little book will help you find ways to cope better. Everyone needs a calm space nowadays.

Daily calm practices

This book suggests one simple calm practice for you to try you each day, for 31 days. All the practices aim to be accessible and flexible. Most of them will take up no more than five to thirty minutes of your busy day.

Almost certainly you will enjoy some of these practices more than others. That's fine. The whole idea is to give you a menu of calming ideas. You can choose your favourites to repeat regularly. You are welcome to discard the ones that don't suit you for now. Perhaps one day you will revisit some of them. You may also have other brilliant calming things to do which I don't talk about. That's fantastic. Please keep doing them. But why not try a few new suggestions too?

Sit for five minutes

Often the simple ways are the best. Sitting quietly for just five minutes is a lovely way to find calm. And anyone can do it. I have particular places where I like to sit - a corner of my garden for warm days, a comfy chair facing a picture of a beach for rainy ones. I put my phone down, maybe light a candle, and just sit. No agenda. No right or wrong way to do it. Simply stopping and sitting still creates a calm space in your day.

Timers

Setting a timer can help you relax. You don't need to worry about being late for whatever you need to do next. This is your calm space. Choose a gentle and soothing alarm sound so you are not jolted fiercely from your relaxation. Some

people like to use meditation or focus apps which play soothing sounds or plant trees in virtual forests.

Today's Calm Practice: Sitting Still

Find somewhere you can sit still for five or ten minutes, preferably without being disturbed. You can sit on a chair, on a cushion on the floor or outside on the grass if it's a nice day. Make sure you are comfortable. Cosy blankets and soft cushions are positively encouraged. Bring a nice cup of coffee or tea if you like. Relax. Set a timer for five or ten minutes. No need to be heroic and sit for longer. Sit. Notice what thoughts go through your mind. Don't try to stop them. Just sit and relax. Notice how you feel when the time is up.