

# Boomers, Elders, & More E-Newsletter

A Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



## Table of Contents

- 2 Learning to say "I Need Help"
- 7 Ways to Embrace Aging
- 10 Tech Corner: Mindfulness Apps
- 12 VCFC Event Details
- 14 Calendar of Events in Nashville and Beyond



Image by Flora Waycott

## Upcoming VCFC Events

### Caregiver Support Group

Mar. 13th 12:00 - 1:00 PM

Guest speaker Emily Harlan from Home Instead Senior Care will facilitate a discussion on the 50/50 rule. A program overcome conflict between family members and facilitate conversation regarding caregiving for a loved one.

Light Hall Room 431

### Boomers, Elders, & More Speaker Series

Mar. 20th 12:00 - 1:00 PM

"Preparing an Advance Directive in 7 Steps"

Presented By: Angela Brown  
Alive Hospice Outreach Coordinator

Many thanks to Alive Hospice for catering lunch for this event. Lunch will be served on a first-come basis. Please e-mail [alice.shi@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:alice.shi@vanderbilt.edu) if you plan to attend.

Light Hall Room 431

# The Most Courageous Self-Care Act: Learning to Say, “I Need Help”

We all know when we're feeling overwhelmed, but learning to press the pause button starts with being vulnerable enough to claim your healing time.



Are you the type of person who's too busy driving from place to place to stop and fill that gas tank with the beaming low fuel light? Too busy rushing about to take a moment? Too guilty to take a pause even though it's clear you need one? Perhaps, you don't feel empowered enough to demand a break? Or, maybe you're just so caught up in your day it's easier to ignore all the signs telling you it's time to pause, breathe, and assess the situation.

Being able to identify the need for a “personal moment” is critical. However, the reality is most of us are already pretty good at this part of the equation. Where we tend to fall short is acting on our own recognition. It's not enough just to notice that low fuel light inside your head. You have to do what it's telling you – pull over, put it in park, and refuel. This isn't always easy and, in fact, often requires a good bit of personal courage.

Taking a moment means intentionally shifting behavior, and, in today's "busy or bust" world this can have consequences. For instance, we might resist due to fear of judgment (others may look at us as slackers). Or, we might worry that pausing will cause us to fall further behind in our already overwhelming workload. We might even fool ourselves into believing we'll break later, knowing full well that later will be just as hectic as the present. The point is, we cling to excuses because it's easier than owning up to our own needs. Self-sacrifice has become more acceptable than self-care.

***When we get quiet, things that are important to us get really loud.***

The good news is, when we finally find the self-awareness to take that moment something remarkable happens. When we get quiet, things that are important to us get really loud. Our capacity for creativity is enhanced. Our perspectives on life become clearer. We realize how important self-care is, and grasp the major role it plays in our ability to feel strong, maintain focus, stay engaged, push for change, and live our best lives.

In the past few weeks, I've laid out a pretty strong case as to why mental health breaks are vital to emotional and mental well-being. While I often imagine that you're all nodding in agreement, let's be honest with each other: understanding the logic and rationale of the why and actually doing something about it are two different things.

## **Do You Have the Courage To Be Vulnerable?**

Admitting that you need help or a moment to yourself requires courage in its starkest form: vulnerability. For a lot of us, this is a terrifying realization. After all, if we embrace our vulnerability, we run the risk of appearing needy or insufficient. We expose ourselves to rejection. We admit to the world that we're not indestructible forces. Vulnerability means baring your truth to another and removing that "I've Got It All Together" mask we often present to the world. This takes guts.

I have read many articles and countless chapters in self-help books that advocate being "courageous" as if it's an easy thing to do, as if overcoming your fears is a simple task. What these pieces fail to point out, however, is that the only way to overcome our fears is to first call them out.

# Three Self-Care Tools for Claiming Your Healing Time

## 1) The Confession Statement: Name it to Tame It

One way to “name it to tame it” is what I like to call “the confession statement.” In a nutshell, it allows you to acknowledge your fears internally, while openly admitting your needs to a confidant. A confession statement might go something like this:

“I’m a little nervous to admit this and I hope you will accept it, but I need to take a step back. I need a quiet moment to find clarity of mind and spirit.”

By finding the strength to share your feelings honestly, not only will you ease your own nervousness, you’ll also create an intimate space in which the other person is free to receive your request, accept it with an open mind, and act upon it with a softened heart. This “confession” disarms both of you, leading to a genuine spirit of understanding. You, the confessor, finds a welcoming and non-judgmental ear. Your confidant knows that he or she is being trusted with your vulnerability, freeing you of burdens that inhibit your self-care. It’s a pretty good feeling all around.

## 2) The Pre-Ask: Asking For Help or Space *Before* You Actually Need It

Most people refuse to ask for help or acknowledge that they need a little space until their anxiety is already at a boiling point. Let’s go back to the “low fuel” light analogy. When the light comes on, you know you’ve only got about 30 miles before running out of gas. But, hey, that’s still 30 miles! No need to start looking for a gas station immediately. Why worry about what’s going to happen down the road, right? In the case of self-care, it’s the accumulation of stressors that haven’t been addressed that flick on that light. These stressors get more and more critical as you head down life’s road, piling up and piling on until you find yourself with an empty tank – or burnout.

In other words, don’t wait too long. Let those you trust know when you feel like you’re approaching the point of needing help or a step back. Give them time to ready themselves so that they can be more effective when you do reach out.

Teeing up a pre-ask sounds something like this: “I’ve got three projects on my plate and I am on track to complete them on time, but I may need to ask for your help if I stumble along the way. Are you open to that?” Or, it might go something like, “I’m afraid to admit this to you, but I’m feeling very foggy and may be incapable of coming to the meeting tomorrow. Is it okay if I let you know by tomorrow morning?”

Think of a pre-ask as the setting of an intention. An intention is an action that hasn’t been enacted yet. A pre-ask invites someone to accept your request for help/space/time before you actually ask for it.



### 3) The Kindness Factor: Remember That People Love To Help

Think about the last time you helped someone, or were willing to recognize their need for space. Chances are you came out of the experience feeling a powerful sense of gratification, goodwill and pride. That's because we humans actually love helping each other. We're hard-wired for empathy. We like doing good things for one another, which is why acts of kindness large and small happen all around the world every single day.

It stands to reason, therefore, that there are plenty of people in your life who at one time or another would have been happy to help you had they been asked. They would have gladly watched your kids; assisted with the project you were stuck on, or just given you the space you needed to take a moment of reflection. The problem was never their willingness to help you. The problem was and is your fear and inability to reach out with the ask.

Friends and family may believe we have everything buttoned up because that's the image we project to the world. They don't offer help because they don't think we need it. Or, if they do recognize the need, they don't want to offend us by pointing it out. After all, no one likes being pitied, right? Boy, do I hate the word "pity".

Empathy is not pity. Empathy is connecting with another person's pain in a deeply meaningful way. It's not feeling sorry for them. It's developing an understanding of their suffering. It's putting yourself in their shoes and accepting their struggles. Empathy is also a two-way street. You can't be empathetic without acknowledging the suffering of others. You also can't open yourself to empathy without acknowledging your own struggles, anxieties, and needs.

People who want to help are out there. But you have to open the door and invite them inside.



# How To Find Mindful Moments In Your Day

You may not always be in a position to ask for help or share your need for space with another. Or, maybe you're just not ready to put yourself out there quite yet. Here are some simple tips to structuring mindful pauses in your day that can help you regroup and catch your breath. They're quick fixes but they work. Plus, over time, creating your own mindful moments will help you become more comfortable with your vulnerability. Who knows? Soon you might be more open to asking those around you for help.

- Use the Breath As Your Anchor: Wherever you are in your day, take a moment to stop, place one hand on your stomach and on your chest, slowly inhaling in through your nose, holding your breath for a few counts, and then slowly exhaling out through the mouth. Do this for a few cycles. Consciously connecting with your breath periodically will help you slow down, relax, and see things more clearly.
- Create Technology-Free Spaces: Figure out a specific timeframe or place where you cannot engage with your computer or mobile devices – over dinner, in the bathroom, the bedroom, while lying in bed – and adhere to this rule.
- Take It To Nature. Make a commitment to get outside every single day. Go for a walk around the block. Sit beside the rolling ocean or a serene lake. Enjoy lunch on a park bench. Go somewhere you can commune with Mother Nature. She's a great listener.
- Listen to A Favorite Song. Getting lost in the rhythms and messages of music is a great way to exist within yourself for 2.5 minutes. Slip on your headphones, let the sound wash over you, and shut everything else out.

## Step Into Your Own Power

Asking for help and accepting it is empowering. When we're able to admit our anxieties, stresses, insecurities, and personal boundaries we open up a dialogue that is essential to self-care. As Roger Ellerton eloquently put it, "when we ask for what we want or demand what we need, we give other people the opportunity to say, 'yes' and we stop saying, 'no' for them."



*When we ask for what we want or demand what we need, we give other people the opportunity to say, 'yes' and we stop saying, 'no' for them.*

# Ways to Embrace Aging in This Youth-Obsessed Culture

By: Lisa Fields



When you look in the mirror and expect to see a younger version of yourself but, instead, someone with worry lines and crow's feet stares back, it can be disheartening. Because our culture values youth and beauty over age and experience, you may have unknowingly convinced yourself that getting older means you'll soon be marginalized and obsolete. What can you do to feel empowered and relevant instead?

The key is changing your mindset, allowing yourself to embrace a positive attitude toward aging and staying active in the ways that matter to you.

"When people say they want to be younger, what they really mean is they want to be more like they were, physically, when they were younger," says Ellen Langer, professor of psychology at Harvard University, who studies the ways people's attitudes toward aging affect their mental and physical health. "Despite what people say, few people want to give up all the experience and growth they've accumulated over the years."

The following are some ideas on how you can embrace aging in this youth-centric culture:

## Let Go of Outdated Notions

Don't identify with outdated stereotypes about older adults. Just because you've hit a milestone birthday doesn't mean you shouldn't be active or involved anymore. Today, people stay in the workforce longer and take better care of themselves than previous generations did.

"I think, years ago, we used to think about retirement as sitting in your rocking chair," says Arthur Kramer, professor of neuroscience at Northeastern University in Boston and professor emeritus at the University of Illinois in Urbana. "The people I know now who are retired are more active than when they were working 40 hours a week."

Decades ago, more people were secretive about their ages. Today, many older adults feel comfortable enough embracing their years to let their hair go gray, demonstrating that their life experience is an asset, not something to be ashamed of.

"People are not aging the way that their parents and grandparents were aging," Langer says. "The model for what it means to be older is changing. Eighty is the new 60."

## Adjust Your Attitude

Research has confirmed the long-held belief that you're only as old as you feel. Studies have shown that as people age, they identify less and less with their actual ages. Feeling more youthful can have protective effects against depression, dementia and more.

"I think I am healthier, happier and stronger than I was at 40," says Noelle Nelson, author of *Happy Healthy... Dead: Why What You Think You Know About Aging Is Wrong and How To Get It Right*. "My knees aren't as good as they were in my 40s, but they're good enough, and I don't care. When you start looking at 'What's good in my life? What's good in my body?' you become more and more of an optimist."

Feeling able is an important factor. Researchers have found that older people who are healthy and active say they feel younger than they are, while younger people with chronic health conditions say they feel older than they are.

Liking how you look helps, too. In one study, women who said they felt younger after they'd gotten their hair done looked younger to independent observers; they also experienced decreases in their blood-pressure levels.



Original Article found on Next Avenue: <https://www.nextavenue.org/embrace-aging-youth-obsessed-culture/>



## Pop Culture Icons Provide Examples

Today, Diane Keaton, Candice Bergen, Lily Tomlin, Morgan Freeman and Robert DeNiro star in films and TV series emphasizing their advanced years, but not as dowdy grandmas or grumpy old men. They're showing that older adults can be sexy, strong and in charge of their lives. Bruce Springsteen, Rod Stewart, Stevie Nicks and Cyndi Lauper still command concert stages, proving that you can be relevant — and a rock star — when you're older.

"I hear people say, 'Isn't it amazing that they can still do this?'" Kramer says. "As long as you stay as healthy as you can and stay engaged in life, the visions of what we're starting to look like are going to change."



## Find Your Passion

Whether you enjoy gardening, swimming or spending time with your grandkids, embracing what's important to you can help you feel more youthful.

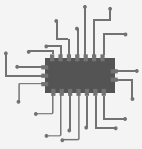
"Don't so much focus on your years; put more focus on what you love to do," Nelson says. "Find something that really, really turns you on, and go for it with every ounce of your being."



## Have Young and Old Friends

People with friends from different generations tend to feel younger than those whose friends are all their age. Younger friends may help you try new things or challenge long-held beliefs. Older friends can serve as role models for aging gracefully.

"Read to school children (or) volunteer to distribute water at triathlons and races — something meaningful to you," Nelson says. "Start surrounding yourself with active older adults who are happy to be alive. You will generally find there are plenty who are older than you, (and) more wrinkled than you who don't care."

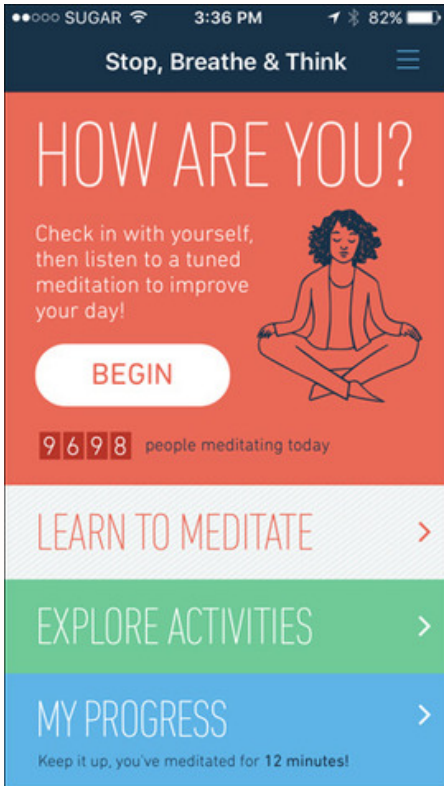


Tech Corner:

# MINDFULNESS

*Apps Worth Downloading*

## 1) STOP, BREATHE, & THINK



Available for iOS and Android

Price: Free or \$10 a month

If other apps expect you to dive right in, Stop, Breathe & Think wants to create a more deliberate, intentional experience. A section called Learn to Meditate explains what mindfulness is and why it's beneficial, including some of the neuroscience and physiology behind it. Each day when you open the app, you're invited to check in with yourself—to rate your mind and body on a scale of “rough” to “great,” and note up to five emotions you're feeling. Then, Stop, Breathe & Think will recommend meditations, yoga videos, and acupressure videos tailored to how you feel.

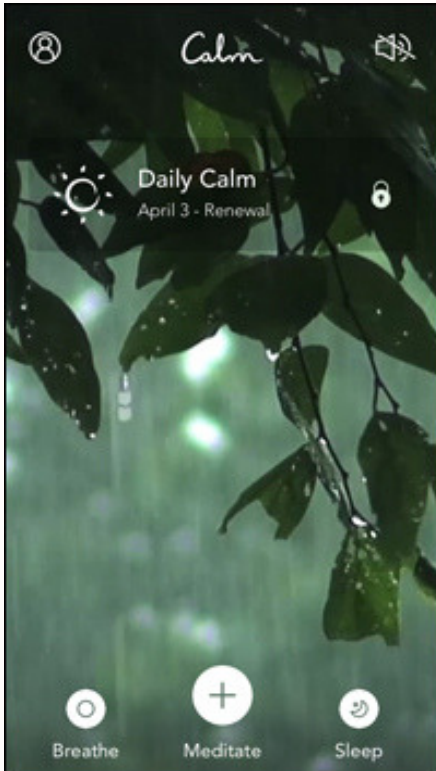
Meditations based on how you feel

The app features 34 free sessions. For many of them, you can choose between different lengths and either a friendly male voice (Grecco) or a calming female voice (Jamie) as your meditation guide. Most of the meditations are short, up to 15 minutes, and feature simple introductory practices like Being Kind to Your Body, Forgiving Yourself, and Joy. You can also simply set a timer and sit in silence, or learn different breathing techniques, or listen to relaxing forest sounds.

***Stop, Breathe & Think is ideal if you need to understand why you're meditating and see how it's benefiting you in order to keep up the habit.***

A progress page keeps track of how your mind and body have been feeling over time, and your most common emotions (before and after meditating, when the app invites you to check in again). Plus, you can earn cute stickers: As a newbie, I've collected “Good Start” and “Trio of Tranquility.” Stop, Breathe & Think is ideal if you need to understand why you're meditating and see how it's benefiting you in order to keep up the habit.

## 2) CALM



Available for iOS and Android

Price: Free, with in-app purchases (\$59.99 annual subscription)

The moment you open the Calm app—rated the 2017 app of the year by Apple—you might feel a sense of...calm. Relaxing sounds of falling rain play automatically in the background, but you could also opt to be greeted by lake noises or birds trilling.

Calm's free offerings include basic mindfulness practices. These free meditations, about 25 in total, come in different lengths, from a quick 3-minute meditation to a half-hour sit. You can start off with 7 Days of Calm, a week-long beginners' series that includes practices for cultivating awareness, returning to the breath when the mind wanders, and training for how to bounce back when the brain switches into "autopilot mode." Other free sessions include 7 Days of Sleep and Calming Anxiety. Plus, like many other apps, you can set a timer for silent meditation or meditate to intermittent bells.

### Calm lives up to its name

For nighttime relaxation, Calm features seven free "sleep stories": bedtime stories for adults that help you transition into slumber with their soothing voices and tranquil nature settings. Calm's music section—a feature that more and more meditation apps seem to be adding these days—includes over 100 free tracks to help you relax, sleep, or focus.

Calm entices you to subscribe by making the first sessions free in series like 7 Days to Focus, 7 Days to Happiness, and 7 Days to Self-Esteem, which feels like a bit of a teaser. But its subscription is one of the cheapest out there if you do decide to make the investment. And if calm is what you're after, the design of the app—with its soft lines, soothing sounds, and uplifting photos—lives up to its name.



# Save the Date



## CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2019

12PM - 1PM

LIGHT HALL ROOM 431

***50/50 Rule: Helping Siblings Overcome Family Conflict  
While Caring for Aging Parents***

### **GUEST SPEAKER: EMILY HARLAN**

The 50/50 Rule is a program family caregivers use to encourage discussion, aid in planning and guide implementation for sharing caregiving responsibilities among family members. Emily Harlan from Home Instead Senior Care will lead a discussion that includes case studies of typical scenarios faced, advice for discussing sensitive topics, and checklists for common responsibilities.







## BOOMERS, ELDERS, & MORE SPEAKER SERIES

*A monthly series covering a blend of topics related to elder care*



# PREPARING AN ADVANCE DIRECTIVE IN 7 STEPS

Presented By:

**ANGELA BROWN**

*Alive Outreach Coordinator*

**Wednesday, March 20th**

**12PM - 1PM**

**Light Hall Room 431**

None of us can predict what tomorrow may bring. Join us for a free presentation on how to prepare an advance directive and make end-of-life healthcare decisions for yourself. Lunch is sponsored by Alive Hospice and will be served on a first-come basis. Please e-mail [alice.shi@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:alice.shi@vanderbilt.edu) if you plan to attend or have any questions.



Alice Shi | Family Services Coordinator | [alice.shi@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:alice.shi@vanderbilt.edu)

# Events in Nashville & Beyond

MARCH 2019

DATE	DESCRIPTION	CONTACT
3/7 5:30-7PM	<b>Just the Facts...Preparing Alzheimer's Caregivers</b> FREE event designed for family members and friends learning to live with the joys and challenges of caregiving. This workshop is not open to professional caregivers. Refreshments will be provided. This series covers the following topics: Diagnosis and Medication, Community Resources, Long-term Care Planning, Behavior & Communication Problems, Caregiver Stress	Main Street Assisted Living (Hendersonville) 615-219-5112 <a href="#">Link for Event Details</a>
3/18 12:30 - 1:30 PM	<b>Frist Art Museum Senior Mondays</b> Discounted admission tickets and parking. Visitors are invited to enjoy live music by Harry Stephenson, aka "Snappy Pappy," in the Grand Lobby from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. A docent-guided tour of a current exhibition is offered at 1:30 p.m.	Ellen Pryor 615-744-4914 <a href="#">Website Link</a>
3/23 2:00 - 3:30 PM	<b>Wendy's Neverland at Morgantown Care &amp; Rehabilitation Center</b> A play by the Signature HealthCARE communities of rural Kentucky in collaboration with TimeSlips. Wendy is beloved by everyone in the nursing home where she lives. Now on hospice, the staff and elders honor her by recreating the stories she's been telling them for years. Join us for a journey through Wendy's Neverland. This play is part of an effort to change the way we engage with nursing home elders and staff. Tickets are FREE, but reservation is required.	270-358-3103 <a href="#">Website Link</a>
Take Note 5/23	<b>3rd Annual Elder Care Expo</b> Hosted by Heritage Law Group. Seniors, caregivers, and families will meet exhibitors, enjoy complimentary breakfast and lunch, and attend seminars by legal and medical professionals to learn about the many resources available.	Gallatin First United Methodist Church 615-989-7054 <a href="#">Website Link</a>