

Learning to Stress Well.¹

Pause. Turn. Listen.

By Mary Elaine Kiener

Picture for a moment the following scene: An adult is standing on the curb at the edge of the road, holding the hand of a small child. Their heads slowly turn from one side to the other. They're out of earshot, yet you can almost hear the adult saying: "Now, remember: before crossing the street, make sure you always stop to look and listen for any cars that might be coming."

As with many such lessons from early childhood, this one has relevance far beyond its initial application. Yet, throughout our too busy, stress-filled lives, it is also one we all too frequently forget. How often we find ourselves continuously darting into the traffic of our daily lives without pausing for a sense of our surroundings. Until, it's too late. Until the crash.

Until, if we're lucky--in spite of multiple near misses and ignored warning signs--we are offered yet another second chance. Thus, it happened, about 20 years ago, when I embarked on my ongoing journey of learning to stress well.

One of the first lessons I was helped to remember was to "Pause, turn and listen". Initially, this lesson begins with simply noticing how (and, so often in my own case, IF) I am breathing. Next, inviting an awareness of what my outer senses are currently experiencing. What am I seeing...hearing...smelling...tasting...touching. What colors, sounds, movement, sensations show up in my awareness. Am I able to simply notice whatever is here now—without judgment, without expecting anything to change. Simply noticing and allowing. Then, perhaps turning towards that which I have noticed, to say hello with a gentle, curious and gracious welcome (that is, admittedly, occasionally easier said than done!).

Over time and with generous practice, I have been able to expand my sensing abilities into ever subtler aspects of inner experiencing. I have learned to notice and be with those definite-but-often-vague inklings of something that can only begin to make sense once I pause, turn and listen in a way that allows its meaning to unfold.

As a result, my life sometimes seems almost magical and filled with wondrous serendipity. As I am increasingly able to let go of needing to control what comes next, it's almost as if I am watching a time-lapse video of a newly planted seed that knows how to sprout and blossom itself into full bloom. Both the seed and my life have the implicit wisdom to live themselves forward—as long as they each receive the right nourishment.

Which reminds me--next time, we'll be exploring "eating". In the meantime, I invite you to pause, turn and listen. Notice how and when your own sense of "hunger" (whether physical or emotional) makes itself known to you. I'd love to hear what you discover.

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¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, March). Learning to stress well. Pause. Turn. Listen. *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.