

6 Ways To Be Truly Present In Every Moment

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“Be happy in the moment, that’s enough. Each moment is all we need, not more.” — Mother Teresa



I’m coming up on a milestone birthday this year — a really big one. Social media is reminding me of this every day, as I watch one high school classmate after another hit the “big one.”

Of course, the “big one” might be a relative term for many of us — life has so many milestone markers for us that it seems we are always stumbling towards one or another, aren’t we?

Was 16 the “big one” for you? 21? 30? 35? 40?

50?

And parallel to this march towards a half-century are my children’s milestone markers, not just found in numbers, but moments along the way as well.

Those ordinary, extraordinary moments that as a parent take my breath away and remind me that the only way to move forward, to not blindly push through milestones and markers, is to breathe, to be present, to look up at life with my eyes wide open and my heart vulnerable.

It's a daily struggle, to be sure. I make my own markers along the way, rituals I use, reminders I send, to train my highly sensitive body to stop, to breathe, to remember all will be well.

To be honest, it's hard work for me. It's a conscious awareness that my natural inclination to think forward, to plan, to control, isn't always serving me in the best way possible. The hard work comes to remember that being here, now, allows fears of the past and future to fade away, and allows me to inhale every beautiful second of life, of motherhood, of simply being.

Not being present breeds restlessness. It forces the interior wiring to hyper-speed, to thinking too far ahead — “future tripping,” a friend once dubbed it.

So when time feels like it is spinning off its axis, when my worries send me off center, I try one of these six ways to stop “future-tripping” and find my way back:

1. Put yourself on “time out.” Remember when the kids were little and this was a consequence? I say, take one! Do what you like to do, even if it's just for 30 minutes. Cook a healthy meal. Bake something delicious. Dig in the soft soil of your garden. Close your eyes and dream. Pet the dog. Curl up under the covers. Whatever it is, make sure it's something to nurture yourself.
2. Find your center. Finding places to express your gratitude will make you feel more connected. One of my favorite writers, Anne Lamott, offers a simple meditation I use frequently: “Help. Thanks. Wow.” Write them down, whisper them to the universe, or meditate on them throughout the day. It's an amazing transformation. Give yourself reminders throughout the day — I use the “Tell Me Later” app to send quotes to my phone at times in the day I know are particularly challenging for me to stay centered.
3. Make a list. OK — list making satisfies my inner teacher-mom. I have a general list of priorities, hopes and things-I'd-really-love-to-do-someday, and then each morning I

choose a few to tackle in the upcoming day. They don't always get done, but it's amazing how when I commit to writing them down, I feel compelled to at least start. And plus, crossing it off when I'm finished is so satisfying! Sometimes seeing our responsibilities in front of us we realize they're not as overwhelming as we once thought.

4. Take a walk. I gave up running years ago, and find that making time for a daily walk helps me to slow down. I like to get away from people (introvert-raising-hand-wildly) so I can really feel the rhythm of my stride and sense the solitude wash down my body. I like the consistency of a familiar path each day, and delight in the small surprises of nature, water, and sky.

5. Breathe. Seriously — pay attention to it. I'm considering setting a "Tell Me Later" reminder just for this — a gentle nudge to inhale, exhale and slow. it. down.

6. Find my balance. For the longest time I was so caught up in the treadmill of raising small children, managing a home, teaching school and trying to maintain friendships that I lost my balance. I threw away those little joys — like writing in my journal and reading a great novel — because I thought I had too many other responsibilities. After teetering dangerously out of balance, I've learned to not deny my inner planner — I think about what can I do for today, and how I can balance it all. We each have the same number of hours in our day — and we get to choose how we spend them. Take small steps, one at a time, to return to the fulcrum of your life.

I'll be honest — being present sometimes feels like a chore. It sometimes seems easier to push ourselves to the end of the line, to view our life through a camera lens hoping to watch the replay some other time. Life is contracting before it expands; that squeezing sensation is the universe reminding you to trust, to open your eyes and look around. When you stop 'future tripping' and pay attention to the glorious, messy, sometimes chaotic but always real life before you, the universe will respond bountifully.

Remember: the milestones in your life are markers of a life well lived. Don't you want to be present to celebrate?