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women

AREA HOME AND HEALTHY LIVING MAGAZINE

**Blasting Covid Boredom,
Family Style**

Rotary Lights Are On!

**Keep 'er Movin'
with Charlie Berens**

Take a "Me-Treat"

Dazzling Lighting Trends



*Lighten
Up!*

LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD
Cindy Ericksen Shows How



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Pictured on cover and top left: Cindy Ericksen, therapist and owner of HeartJourney Marriage & Family Therapy. Photos by Frontier Photography. Hair and makeup by Anna Seidel at Orange Pearl Salon. Photos taken at Bittersweet Flower Market.

Keep Calm and Breathe

Therapist Cindy Ericksen guides us through lightening the emotional load.

BY LEAH CALL | PHOTOS BY FRONTIER PHOTOGRAPHY



Cindy Ericksen, therapist and owner of HeartJourney, encourages meditation and mindfulness to get through challenging times.

2020 is certainly a year to remember. The weight of a worldwide pandemic combined with civil unrest and a divisive political climate has many of us struggling to carry the emotional load. Fortunately, people like Coulee Region woman Cindy Ericksen are providing tools to lighten the load through mindfulness practices that can help us cope with uncertainty and stress.

“Mindfulness and meditation, specifically, can be life changing for people,” says Ericksen, therapist and owner of La Crosse-based HeartJourney. “It strongly affects the things we are most challenged with during this time. It helps us feel more comfortable with our own emotions and the emotions of others. It helps us handle our emotions better, and it has been proven to reduce depression and anxiety.”

When the Safer at Home order was implemented to prevent the spread of Covid-19, Ericksen knew it would protect physical health, but she also anticipated the negative impact it would have on mental and emotional health.

“I saw right away that people were going to be anxious and fearful and really sad. My first thought was ‘we all need to be meditating,’” says Ericksen, who uses meditation and mindfulness to help individuals and couples work through relationship conflict, anger management, depression and anxiety.

YOU’VE GOT THIS

Ericksen is among the many mental and physical health professionals who stepped up to help people cope with the uncertainty of the pandemic. She began offering free guided meditation videos on her Facebook page and website as a way to support her clients through this tense time.

“I’ve had so much positive response,” she says. “I have people following my meditations from all over the world. It has been very heartwarming and inspiring.”

Ericksen recommends meditating for 10 minutes a day, five days a week. If 10 minutes is too much for busy adults and parents with

young children, squeezing out just five minutes can make a difference. Numerous meditation apps such as Insight Timer, Headspace, Smiling Mind and Ten Percent Happier can help people build a meditation habit and stick with it. Many of these are free.

“The main thing that meditation does is help our brain function more effectively,” notes Ericksen.

In addition to meditation, Ericksen embraces self-compassion exercises pioneered by Dr. Kristin Neff to reduce negative emotions and manage stress. These self-compassion exercises include changing our inner self-talk and having a go-to phrase, such as “You’ve got this” or “It’s going to be OK,” that comforts and reassures.

“The first part is saying the phrase, and the second part is physically comforting yourself,” adds Ericksen. “That might be putting your hand on your heart, giving yourself a hug, putting your hands to your cheeks or maybe just rubbing your legs—whatever is physically comforting to you.”

Another stress-reducing tool: just breathe. Ericksen suggests breathing in for four counts and breathing out for six counts. “If you breathe out longer than you breathe in, it actually helps lower your heart rate; that then allows you to calm down and be more relaxed and centered.”

For those needing additional support for chronic anxiety or depression, a call to Ericksen at HeartJourney can help put you on the path to positive change.

“People often don’t want to come for therapy until things are really out of control, but it makes much more sense to start early when you first start feeling not yourself,” says Ericksen, who suggests three to five sessions to get back on track. “If you wait longer, you end up being in therapy for quite a while, and it takes a lot longer to actually feel better.”

HER HEART JOURNEY

Ericksen’s own journey was a winding path that always included work with families and children. About 15 years ago, she became a therapist with a degree in marriage and family therapy. She started HeartJourney seven years later. In non-Covid times, she would see clients in her office in the Exchange Building on Fifth Avenue in La Crosse; she currently conducts teletherapy from her home.

“I would say half of my clients are couples with relationship challenges. That’s my specialty,” notes Ericksen. “The rest of my clients come to me with anxiety and depression.”



“We can use mindfulness skills to get through those difficult moments, so we can be our best selves.”

—Cindy Ericksen

Clients often don’t know the cause of their anxiety or depression. They need change in their lives, but they need some support to identify and implement that change.

“As we work together, they gradually start to realize that there is some part of their life that isn’t working for them. Then we start working on whatever that is and help them make that journey to create the change they need in their life to find fulfillment and happiness.”

Four years ago, Ericksen added coaching to her list of services, focusing on mindfulness coaching and transition coaching. “Coaching is much more goal and action oriented. Where therapy is more about healing, coaching is more specifically about making changes in your life—setting goals and working toward those goals to make changes.”

Like therapy sessions, coaching sessions are done via phone or (in non-Covid times) in person. The changes brought about through these coaching sessions ultimately help individuals live happier, more authentic lives.

Whether she is working with individuals, couples or families, mindfulness and meditation are at the center of all the services Ericksen offers. “I love it, because it is so positive and nonjudgmental. We can use mindfulness skills to get through those difficult moments, so we can be our best selves and be the person we want to be in our relationships, in the workplace and in our family.”

Helping people to live their best lives is a pretty rewarding career. “I am so blessed to have a career where I can help people. It is an honor to be able to walk that path with so many people and see them blossom into their full selves.” **CRW**

Freelance writer Leah Call lives and writes with her family in Westby. She is now hooked on Cindy Ericksen’s meditations and highly recommends them to find some calm in these crazy times.