Easy Mindfulness Practices with Andrea Torres

00:00:00 **Andrea Torres**

Be gentle with yourself. Any time that we make a choice to go inward and to look at ourselves and to make changes, it can be tough.

00:00:10 **Christina Barsi**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:12 **Sun Ezzell**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:16 **Christina Barsi**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:33 **Sun Ezzell**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:00:37 **Student**

And I know I want to achieve my goals and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:00:45 **Teacher**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pamona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:00:48 **Christina Barsi**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:00:51 **Student**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter ...

00:00:59 **Christina Barsi**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:00:59 **Student**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:02 **Christina Barsi**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast-

00:01:13 **Sun Ezzell**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:19 **Christina Barsi**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:24 **Sun Ezzell**

Welcome, in today's episode, we talk with Mt. SAC professor, counselor, and mindfulness meditation facilitator, Andrea Torres.

00:01:32 **Sun Ezzell**

Thanks for joining us as Andrea shares the story of her journey to mindfulness meditation, some ideas for developing your own practice, and some of her favorite resources for further exploration. I felt calm and peaceful after just a few minutes of talking with Andrea. So I hope you feel the same.

00:01:49 **Sun Ezzell**

And for some additional calm and peace, we even have a special guided meditation also led by Andrea to accompany this episode. So be sure to listen to that next, if you haven't already.

00:02:04 **Sun Ezzell**

Good morning, and welcome to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Thank you for joining us.

00:02:08 **Andrea Torres**

Good morning, I'm happy to be here and grateful to be sharing space with you today.

00:02:14 **Sun Ezzell**

I was wondering if you could talk with us about what mindfulness meditation is.

00:02:19 **Andrea Torres**

Sure. So to my understanding, there's a lot of different ways to view mindfulness meditation. I really love that there's a lot of freedom in it, and there's so many different ways to practice. But the way that I see mindfulness meditation is a way to connect to the present moment. A way to use our senses and our breath to be in the moment, to have a pause, to have some stillness throughout our day.

00:02:56 **Andrea Torres**

I mean, it just allows us that space that we might not take throughout our day because we are running from thing to thing or just taking care of task after task. And we actually can do mindfulness meditation while we're doing our tasks. And that's the really great thing about it.

00:03:17 **Andrea Torres**

So we can do take like a mindful walk in which as we're walking, we are paying attention to the sounds that we might be hearing. So the birds or the trees - we are looking at the flowers, the sky and really just kind of taking everything in.

00:03:36 **Andrea Torres**

And so, I really love that about mindfulness meditation, is that it's not just sitting on a cushion for a while. We can use it throughout our day by just connecting to the moment by allowing whatever is to be, not trying to change things, or control things. And also, not judging ourselves. We often have a lot of thoughts, a lot of beliefs in our mind.

00:04:07 **Andrea Torres**

In meditation, there's something called a "monkey mind," and that's all those thoughts that are constantly happening. And a lot of times, they're our irrational thoughts, our fears. Especially right now, we have a lot of things to feel fearful of or things that are uncertain. And so it allows us to just be in the moment without judgment of ourselves and of these thoughts. We can learn to welcome our thoughts in, to see them, to maybe be mindful of whatever messages they might be sending. And then also, practice to release them, to not attach to them.

00:04:50 **Andrea Torres**

And so for me, that's really what mindfulness meditation has been. It's just living mindfully, making more conscious choices, responding to things rather than reacting in ways that we might have reacted in the past.

00:05:07 **Sun Ezzell**

That's so beautiful. Thank you for sharing. Would you be comfortable sharing a little bit about your journey to mindfulness meditation? Is it something you grew up with? What was that journey like for you?

00:05:20 **Andrea Torres**

Yeah, so I did not grow up with any type of mindfulness. I grew up with more of a religious background and praying and that kind of thing. But never really connected what I was doing to now, what I call sitting in stillness and mindfulness.

00:05:39 **Andrea Torres**

But just a little bit about myself and my journey to it - I actually was born and raised in Pomona and grew up in the area. And I come from a really large extended family; was exposed and experienced many different things, such as alcoholism and drug use, gang involvement, different types of abuse in many forms. My parents were divorced when I was 14-years-old and just experiencing a lot of childhood traumas, chaos, instability.

00:06:12 **Andrea Torres**

But among all of that, my parents gave my sister and I, a lot of unconditional love and support, and really just did the best job that they could. But that doesn't mean that we weren't still affected from a lot of the traumas. And so, as a young girl, when my parents got divorced, I was a little lost. Then I got pregnant when I was 15-years-old. And that experience really changed the trajectory of my life.

00:06:42 **Andrea Torres**

I began to have some direction in my life and actually school and education became my hope. I actually started at Mt. SAC when I was 18-years-old, raising my two-year-old daughter. And she, now, I'm very proud and happy to say is 26-year-old college grad and doing really well and just is my best friend. And I really credit education and this journey to all of that.

00:07:12 **Andrea Torres**

But I also found inspiration and guides through a lot of professors at Mt. SAC. I always talk about Dr. Linda Rillorta, who is associate professor. And she inspired me to love sociology and the desire to be a college professor began for me in her classroom.

00:07:32 **Andrea Torres**

And so through school and many of my past experiences, they began to reveal themselves and I realized that I needed some help with some of those things that I experienced as a child. And I found my way to therapy and was able to get some low cost therapy (back when I was younger, I didn't really have an income) through Project Sister in Pomona. And I started reading a lot of books and learning about self-care and positive affirmations and healing ourselves. And just started reading about meditation and mindfulness and connecting to our bodies.

00:08:14 **Andrea Torres**

And so at the time when I found meditation, when I walked into the studio in Pomona, I was going through a breakup of a really long relationship that was really challenging, and the studio was starting a training. And because I love learning, I decided to do it. And then that year, I met some really great teachers, did a lot of journaling and I meditated my way to more healing, found connection to my body, and really just found a calm and stillness that I really needed at the time.

00:08:49 **Andrea Torres**

And so really, that's how I found the practice, and I use it now daily. I'm so grateful I've been working with the Bridge Program on campus for really the last 15 years, I have a beautiful family of colleagues and coworkers there, and was able to offer some wellness and self-care sessions to our students. And started leading women's circles at the studio that I was working in and couples sessions.

00:09:20 **Andrea Torres**

And then I started working with our student health services and providing sessions at some of their great events that they would have going for students. And I just really feel like it's now a part of my life and so grateful that I am able to provide the service and provide this space, especially now with everything that's going on. And to be able to just provide the space of connecting to our body, to maybe doing some healing and coping from the stresses that we might be experiencing now, as well as just things that we've experienced in our life.

00:09:56 **Andrea Torres**

And so I think I'm just on the continuous journey of using this practice to continue to help myself and others.

00:10:06 **Sun Ezzell**

What a beautiful gift to share mindfulness meditation with others when it's been so healing for you. Thank you for doing that.

00:10:15 **Andrea Torres**

Yeah, it's definitely something I'm grateful for. I often talk about things that manifest in our lives. And I think I really had this idea a long time ago, wanting to just provide spaces for our community, for our students, for all the people that we work with to just have this space on our campus or in our community where people can come and just have a moment of connection.

00:10:42 **Andrea Torres**

So I'm really grateful to be able to offer it. And again, it helps me as well. Every session that I'm in with people, it's the same - I feel the same way, I get that connection. I have those moments of stillness and we share these moments of holding space for one another.

00:10:59 **Sun Ezzell**

And now, you're offering workshops through Zoom, right?

00:11:03 **Andrea Torres**

Right. I'm so grateful that when we were on campus, I was offering them in person. But once we went online, we were able to, through student health services, provide sessions still for students, and then also for faculty and staff. And so, I have sessions weekly through the fall semester, as well as a couple of workshops. And we have some other workshops as well through student health services that people can access.

00:11:31 **Andrea Torres**

And so it's definitely something that if anybody's never done it before, it's a way to get started because they are 30-minute sessions. So it's not very long; before you know it, the time is up. And you've had just that little bit of time in your day to focus on yourself.

00:11:47 **Sun Ezzell**

That's so wonderful, that you're able to pass that along and share it with others. I'm sure for many people, that's one of the key experiences that they'll take with them from their time at Mt. SAC.

00:12:00 **Andrea Torres**

Right. It's all of these coping skills and connections, and these new things that we're learning, I think that are going to continue to help us and guide us through this experience that we're all having together. And things that hopefully we will continue to do.

00:12:17 **Andrea Torres**

Moving forward, I think there are so many shifts and so many lessons and things that we're learning about ourselves and our lives and what it is that we really want, and I think that's so important. And this is one of the things that I hope people will take with them, knowing that it's something that you can do in your day. It's something that you can also do with your families.

00:12:39 **Andrea Torres**

I was providing some sessions, just personally for my family and friends and I ended up doing a children's and a teens session as well, because I was noticing that some of my friends were bringing their kids on. And it was such a beautiful space for their children as well, because our children are going through just as much as we are, our families. And if it's something that we can help also our families to get through, this very challenging time, then I think it's a great practice.

00:13:13 **Andrea Torres**

And again, it doesn't have to be that you sit down for 30 minutes, it can be that you take that mindful walk and that together as a family, that you're talking about the things that you're seeing on your walk, or that you're practicing.

00:13:30 **Andrea Torres**

One of my favorite ways to practice mindfulness is through gratitude. And so, maybe throughout your day with your family, you're taking a few moments to think about the things that you're grateful for in your day, and the things that you do have, and the experiences that you are having with your family and friends during this time.

00:13:53 **Sun Ezzell**

Listening to you share those ideas make me think about how we're all experiencing something that probably no one alive has experienced, and the ways that that opens up some new possibilities for thinking about how we want our lives to be now. It's really lovely to offer mindfulness meditation as a way to move forward in a really healthy and positive way.

00:14:18 **Andrea Torres**

Right, and I think that it's once you just try it out and try accessing some of the different resources … maybe you're going to ask me about this next, but I would like to share some of the resources, and we do have some on the student health center web page.

00:14:37 **Andrea Torres**

But a good way to get started is by using different apps that you can use for guided meditation, for sound meditation. YouTube has a lot of great guided sessions as well. And so, there's a lot of podcasts speaking of what we're doing here. I definitely find a lot of new resources through podcasts as well. And just reading about it and learning as much as I can.

00:15:05 **Andrea Torres**

There's a lot of resources out there through our campus, through our webpage, but also through others. Other colleges are offering a lot of free sessions as well, and as well as some other community organizations to be able to find classes at low cost or even again, just guided meditations through apps that a lot of our students can get for free. Some of them are offering them for free or very low cost on those apps. But there is a lot of free content as well.

00:15:39 **Sun Ezzell**

I think it's been so moving to see how many people have made things like mindfulness meditation, or yoga available for free to the public, through whatever platform they have available to them. It kind of gives me a lot of hope for humanity, that people can pull together and be so generous with people that they don't even know.

00:16:02 **Andrea Torres**

Right. I think it's the feeling that we are all going through the same thing, maybe in different ways and to different levels. But as a collective, we are all experiencing feelings of grief, of loss, of fear, anxiousness. And that's one way where I think even for myself, once we went into pandemic or quarantine, I started offering my class just kind of to my friends and family so they can access it over Instagram or things like that. Because I knew that … I don't know, it just felt right to be able to just offer it in that way.

00:16:45 **Andrea Torres**

And I think that's the great thing about us offering it at Mt. SAC, is that students and families or just people in general, if you can't access it through studios and pay, then we can get it here through our campus.

00:17:04 **Sun Ezzell**

Absolutely.

00:17:33 **Andrea Torres**

A lot of our anxiousness has to do with our future thinking, and right now, because so much is uncertain, a lot of us have a lot more high anxiety because of that. And so when we do practice this, it does help us remain in the present. And you know our breath is really our life force and it's one of our most important tools. And I always say it's always with us.

00:17:33 **Sun Ezzell**

We have the tools that we need. That's really beautiful.

00:17:38 **Andrea Torres**

Yeah, I think that's one of the best parts of it, is that we don't have to go anywhere or wait for our appointment time or those kinds of things. And I feel like all of that is valid and important, but we do need these skills that we can use just in our days, in our spaces.

00:17:58 **Sun Ezzell**

So do you have a recommendation for those moments when maybe someone's feeling just so overwhelmed or so fearful, or maybe their child is feeling really overwhelmed? Something that somebody might be able to do for 10 seconds or five seconds just to get started?

00:18:16 **Andrea Torres**

Yeah, I think that the best way is to really just take maybe three deep breaths. Stop there, do it together, have a little pause. And if you are with your family members and in that moment, you can also allow for placing your hand on each other's chest and feeling that breath go in and out, or even just on your own, and just taking those three deep breaths.

00:18:42 **Andrea Torres**

The other thing is maybe even just stopping and saying out loud, "I'm grateful for this," or being able to express that feeling of fear in the moment. So many times we run from our feelings and we don't want to deal with them. And so, that's a really good way to - is to just actually feel what we're feeling.

00:19:04 **Sun Ezzell**

And so you mentioned some other kinds of mindfulness that you like. Like going for a mindful walk or a gratitude practice. Are there other strategies or practices like that?

00:19:18 **Andrea Torres**

Yeah, I think journaling is really a good one because it does help to ... we're moving, we're moving our hands, we're getting our feelings and our thoughts out on paper. And so, that's helpful. I also like using sound. So sound baths are really good. So sometimes, when we feel like we can't sit there; the sound, the music really just kind of helps us in those moments.

00:19:42 **Andrea Torres**

I mean, I like to do things also like dancing. It really just kind of gets you in your body. And again, when you're doing things like movement, it helps us to be present and to be in the moment.

00:19:57 **Sun Ezzell**

And that sounds like a good thing to do with kids as.

00:20:00 **Andrea Torres**

Oh, yes. And they also have, I mean, again, there's so many resources out there. But there's things like even just in the moment with children, shaking it out. Just standing there, taking a moment, shaking out your hands, shaking out your legs, shaking out your body a little, because that just in the moment, moves the energy around and shifts you.

00:20:21 **Sun Ezzell**

Thank you for sharing those. So, if people are interested in taking your workshop, they can find that information on the student health center website?

00:20:31 **Andrea Torres**

Right, student health center website. And there is a page called Mindfulness and Meditation, and students can sign up there as well as faculty and staff. And it'll take you - faculty and staff will take you to Pod Connect, and then students will register directly there. They are separate sessions. So I have two sessions a week for students, and then one session a week for faculty and staff, as well as several Fridays during the semester for faculty and staff as well.

00:21:04 **Andrea Torres**

And I am able to provide workshops to programs as well. So my contact information is on there. That's just one aspect. We do have prerecorded workshops that are there, that people can just watch themselves and they have to do with things like how to sleep better and releasing nervous energy. And just a lot of the things that we might be going through that we might just need a little bit of help and coping skills for that.

00:21:32 **Sun Ezzell**

That's so wonderful. And then you mentioned that there are some other resources that you'd like to share as well?

00:21:39 **Andrea Torres**

So sure. Those are also on the website, but I think a good way to start is through using apps. So, I use an app called the Insight Timer. I really like that one because there's a lot of free content on there, but there's also Calm app, and there are links to those apps on that webpage as well.

00:22:00 **Sun Ezzell**

Great. And we can include links in the show notes for the podcast episode as well.

00:22:05 **Andrea Torres**

Perfect, perfect.

00:22:07 **Sun Ezzell**

So if somebody wanted to do some reading about mindfulness meditation, are there any books that you would recommend or authors you love?

00:22:15 **Andrea Torres**

Yes. I just recently read a book called Revolution of the Soul by Seane Corn. And she just really has a beautiful way of speaking about it. She talks about her own experiences through her journey in life but then offers so many great resources throughout the book. And so, that's a really great book.

00:22:39 **Andrea Torres**

One of the ones that I started within my training, which is also really good; it's called the Mindfulness in Plain English, and that's a really great book to get started. It really just gives you a breakdown of what mindfulness is, the different benefits. And so it's a really great one.

00:23:00 **Andrea Torres**

One of the podcasts that I recently found that I really like is called Heal Thyself, Dr. Christian Gonzalez. And he has a lot of really great different topics. But he has some mindfulness and meditation episodes as well. You know, some about research and the different ways that it can benefit us, especially during this time.

00:23:24 **Sun Ezzell**

Thank you so much. And we'll include all of those links to all of those in the podcast show notes. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. Is there anything else you wanted to share with us?

00:23:34 **Andrea Torres**

Sure. You know, just first I'd like to say, thank you. I'm so grateful for this time and you holding space for me as well. And I also just want to say it's been my mantra for the last few years to be gentle with yourself. Any time that we make a choice to go inward and to look at ourselves and to make changes, it can be tough.

00:23:57 **Andrea Torres**

So I use that to tell myself to be gentle with everything that I'm doing, with all that we have going on. I think it's important to get support from others, to reach out and ask for help. There is support out there and it's just a matter of asking, which I know can be hard. But there is support and to get help.

00:24:20 **Andrea Torres**

And again, to know that meditation doesn't have to look like sitting on the floor for an hour - that it can be done throughout our day. And that just to be patient with yourself. It is a practice. It's something that … just like any practice that the more that we do it, the more that it becomes a part of who we are really.

00:24:41 **Andrea Torres**

So just thank you so much for the space, I really appreciate it.

00:24:46 **Sun Ezzell**

Thank you as well. It's been an honor to talk with you today and thank you for sharing this gift with us through the podcast and with the whole Mt. SAC community.

00:24:59 **Andrea Torres**

Thank you.

00:24:59 **Christina Barsi**

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00:25:12 **Christina Barsi**

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