

Filling Time Versus FULLfilling Time? – Dr. Kristina Wilder



As a mother of three young children, I find a frequent challenge in my life is finding time for all of those things I NEED to do and all those things I WANT to do. Many of my clients say they find the same thing in their lives, as well – we live in such a busy world, the time available to do everything feels so limited. Because none of us can create more time, it's that much more important to ensure that we spend that precious resource on things that feel fulfilling instead of on things that just fill the time.

To understand the difference between fulfilling time versus filling time, I often use the example of watching TV. If your favorite show is on from 8 – 9, how often do you watch the show that comes on at 9 “just because” it's on? In this example, the show you look forward to and get excited by would be the “fulfilling” one and the show after it is just “filling”. Paying closer attention to those choices we make every day can help us cut out things that don't really give us what we're looking for in life and leave more time for those activities and things that really do have a positive impact on mood and quality of life.

So, how do you implement this? One simple way to increase your attention to what you're doing is to periodically check in with yourself throughout the day. When you do, ask yourself "Is this really how I want to be spending my time right now?". If the answer is no, then you've just given yourself an opportunity to make a positive change. You could also start asking yourself 10 minutes after starting a TV show or activity if you're really enjoying what you're doing just then, or whether you would rather be doing something else.

Increasing your awareness of what you're doing while also keeping in mind what your personal goals are is the aim here. By monitoring your activity "diet" you can see if you are really feeding yourself FULFILLING things, or if you are just FILLING yourself with things that are available but have no real value.

– Dr. Kristina Wilder

Shift **Supports**
#TeamUnbreakable

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment is very proud to have supported [Cameron Helps](#), a charitable organization whose goal is to protect youth from anxiety, depression and suicide by fostering lifelong exercise through running. Over the past few months, a group of teens attended an after-school program at the [Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre](#) where they



were paired with local runners in a 12-week, learn-to-run program. The group built their endurance, with twice-weekly practice runs, and then competed in the Unbreakable Bold and Cold 5K Run for Youth Mental Health on November 27, 2016. Shift was proud to assist the [#TeamUnbreakable](#) runners by sponsoring the admissions fees for a group of at-risk youth.

More than ever before, we know that exercise is vital to overall health and to good mental health. Research consistently shows that people who exercise regularly have fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety and anger. They have lower rates of psychiatric conditions and report feeling like they have better social connections, another important factor in maintaining good emotional health.

Even small amounts of regular exercise offer big benefits for mental wellbeing. Exercise can restore normal mood when depressed or anxious and because exercise itself is a stressor on the body, regular 'doses' of it leave the body better able to cope when stressful challenges occur in daily life. Exercise also increases the brain's production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter known to be strongly related to anxiety and depression.

[Support #TeamUnbreakable and Cameron Helps](#) in their efforts to promote mental and emotional wellbeing in youth – and get out

and exercise!

Bring Conscious Awareness to Your Actions

Human bodies are exceptionally good at making complicated things routine, like driving cars down busy roadways at the same time that we're singing along to music and adjusting the mirrors. This is really useful because it means I don't have to waste my precious mental resources relearning everyday things, like how to move my hand to some food and bring it up to my mouth. Once I learn how to do it, my body just does it and I'm free to preserve my very precious resource of conscious attention for other really important things, like determining which of those things in the environment is safe or dangerous.

One side effect of this continuous automation system is that once something becomes routine, we basically lose sight of the fact that it's happening. It's almost like it becomes invisible and we forget we're even doing it. This can be challenging when it comes to managing stress. Many people speed up when they feel stressed. They try to cope by getting busier and doing more things more quickly. When we cope like that over and over, without any conscious awareness of what we're actually doing, we can end up making challenging situations even worse.

Here at Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment we work to help you tune in to the kinds of invisible thoughts and pressures that drive you to push yourself too hard, and to those behaviours you might still do even when you'd rather not be

doing them. Learning how to pay better attention gives you the chance to make new choices, right now, to decide whether you want to continue performing habits that may be familiar but no longer helpful. Visit us at shiftct.com and see more about how we can help you change behaviours that are getting in your way.

www.shiftct.com

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment helps people to cope with stress, anxiety and depression.

[The Teen Trap](#)

We regularly see older teens and young adults who feel anxiety and worry when they think about taking their next steps towards school or career. They tell us they often feel bothered by physical symptoms of stress, like tension, irritability, headaches and anxiety, which makes sense – leaving the comfort of something you know well, like the high school or university you've attended for the past four years can feel like a scary thing.

As kids mature into their early adult years, more of their brain comes online, especially those parts that allow them to see the world from a broader perspective. They begin to see how hard the adults in their lives work to succeed and get things done, and they start becoming aware of how some folks do really well, while others struggle.

The 'teenage's trap' is a mental one. It happens when young people put two and two together and realize that they will also have to face the struggles of adult life, but without the benefit of all those extra years of experience that adults rely on to reassure themselves that they'll be okay because they've already made it through so many other challenges before. Young people often make the mistake of believing that they don't have enough of what it takes to be successful and that's when they start worrying and feeling the stress.

We work with adolescents in this situation all the time, helping them learn to cope with anxiety and worries and helping them understand that success in life isn't the one-shot deal they often think it is, but rather the sum total of all the choices a person makes over many years and transcends any single effort that doesn't go as planned. When young adults can lean in and really get into whatever is they're doing right then, they'll find that even the challenges bring their own reward and the anxious worry disappears.

Congratulations to Dr. Kristina Wilder!



We are very happy to congratulate Kristina on passing all of her exams and achieving the full

license to practice as a Psychologist!

Dr. Kristina Wilder is now a full member of The College of Psychologists of Ontario, after passing all of her exams and completing the final steps of her formal, clinical training. We value Kristina's active and thoughtful participation in the treatment and assessment aspects of our clinic and welcome her into the profession!

Kristina works with children, adolescents, adults, families and couples. Read more about her background [here](#).

Introduction to Mindful Living

**Next Group January 15 – February
19, 2015**

Take a step toward a greater quality of life with a seasoned teacher and cultivate your understanding of the basic principles of living mindfully. Over six weeks, our Intro to Mindful Living program guides participants through a variety of mindfulness practices in an open and supportive environment.



an open and supportive environment.

The workshop covers:

- How to bring mindful awareness into everyday life
- How to contain worries and be present in the moment
- Tools for coping with adversity and life's challenges

The course is open to all adults – no previous experience with mindfulness or meditation is required. Because mindful living reduces stress and the tendency to get stuck in automatic patterns of upsetting thoughts, it is especially helpful for people struggling with anxiety, depression post-traumatic stress, anger, chronic pain and grief.

Registration:

\$300.00 (Covered by most extended health benefit plans.)

Our next group will run on Thursday evenings, from 7 – 8 pm, starting January 15 through to February 19, 2015.

Call the office at 905-849-1288 for information or to register.

www.shiftct.com

Shift Cognitive Therapy Oakville is a psychology practice that helps people learn to manage anxiety, stress and depression.

Nutrition as a First-Line Treatment for Mental Health? Believe it.

Everyone knows that eating well is good for you, but people (and scientists) are only at the beginning stages of realizing just how important good nutrition is. This is especially true in the area of mental health and mental illness. [Dr. Julia Rucklidge](#), a Canadian clinical psychologist who is a professor at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, offered a sobering review of her and others' research demonstrating that nutrition may be more effective at treating depression, bipolar disorder, ADHD and post-traumatic stress disorder than the psychiatric medications Western medicine has relied upon for decades. She gave her talk at a recent [TEDx](#) conference earlier in 2014.

Dr. Rucklidge emphasized that in Western nations, the typical treatment for mental illnesses follows the established, 'medical model,' in which the usual first-step treatment is medication, followed by psychological therapies, followed – if at all – by other efforts, like diet and exercise. This type of approach has been our standard for decades, and for good reason: It tends to work – for physical illnesses. But Dr. Rucklidge summarizes research from over the past 10 – 15 years suggesting that this may not be the best approach for mental disorders. Citing a variety of clinical studies and the very important work of author Robert Whitaker (see his book [Anatomy of an epidemic](#) for a comprehensive and somewhat chilling assessment of the over-prescription of psychiatric medications), Dr. Rucklidge illustrates that despite the widespread use of very common psychiatric medications like the SSRIs and benzodiazepines for depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety, and the antipsychotics for schizophrenia, the

prevalence of those disorders and the rates of impairment because of the symptoms of those disorders is going up instead of down! She asks:

“If a treatment is truly effective, then shouldn’t the rates of disorder and disability as a direct consequence of that illness be decreasing, rather than increasing?”

and highlights research findings showing that rates of recovery and relapse from depression are no better now than they were 50 years ago, despite our increasing use of antidepressant medications. If that’s not depressing, what is?

Dr. Rucklidge notes that from the traditional view depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety and schizophrenia are viewed as serious conditions that require serious treatments, and nutrition plays only a very minor role, if any at all. Yet, she outlines the findings of a growing body of research showing that giving dietary supplements of micronutrients and minerals as a first-line treatment can yield greater benefits than traditional psychiatric medications. For example, she described her 2014 study of adults with ADHD who were randomly assigned to receive either micronutrients or placebo treatment over an 8-week trial. She found that those adults taking micronutrients:

- were more than twice as likely to respond to treatment than those taking the placebo,
- reported fewer symptoms of depression along with their ADHD
- reported that their symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity reduced to normal, non-clinical levels and they reported their ADHD symptoms were, on the whole, less impairing in their lives.

Importantly, those who continued taking the micronutrients over the following year reported maintaining and sometimes

improving on their original gains, and that the symptoms of those people who stopped taking the micronutrients or switched over to traditional stimulant medications worsened.

She also reported on the findings of two recent studies she and her colleagues did following the massive [earthquakes in Christchurch, NZ](#) in 2011 where they randomly assigned people struggling with symptoms of post-traumatic stress to receive one of two different micronutrient preparations (one of them at either a higher or lower dosage). Again, their results showed that the trauma symptoms of people all three groups reduced in intensity and, in the case of those people who took the higher dosage, the results were quite significant. The average rate of PTSD in the group at the start of the trial was 65%. After one month of treatment with micronutrients that number dropped to only 19%. Amongst those who chose to continue taking the micronutrients over the following year, the rates of PTSD dropped even further, to approximately 10%. By comparison, the rate of PTSD in those people in the control group (that is, those who did not receive any micronutrient treatments) did not change from its initial rate over the one-month trial. What explains these impressive results? According to Dr. Rucklidge “A well-nourished body and brain is better able to withstand ongoing stress and recover from illness.”

Dr. Rucklidge concludes her talk with the observation that poor nutrition is very likely a key contributor to the epidemic of mental illness striking Western populations. Her suggestion? Maybe it's time to turn that traditional, medical model on its head: When people begin to exhibit symptoms it's probably best to start by improving their diet and frequency of exercise first, to continue with effective psychological therapies, [including CBT](#), second and then, if they still need the boost, to supplement with the lowest-possible dose of medication required to finish the job. How's that for an innovative idea?

Congratulations to Siren Busch!



We are very happy to congratulate Siren on passing all of her exams and achieving the full license to practice as a Psychological Associate!

Psychological Associates are members of The College of Psychologists of Ontario and possess a masters degree in psychology. To become licensed, Psychological Associates will typically work in the field of psychology for a minimum of four years and then do an additional year of practice under the supervision of a registered psychologist, followed by the passing of three exams.

Siren is a valued member of the Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment team and works with adolescents and adults. Read more about her background [here](#).

What is Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT)?

Emotion Focused Therapy for couples is a short-term therapy, usually lasting between 8 and 20 sessions. Research demonstrates that it is effective, with most outcome studies showing more than a 70% rate of recovery from marital distress in 10 – 12 sessions. The reason EFT works so well is that it directly addresses the three questions that we all want the answers to:

Do I matter to my partner?

Can I count my partner to be there for me?

Will my partner answer me when I call?

The answers to these three questions helps us to measure the security of our attachment connection in a relationship. Human beings are social creatures, so our ability to attach with others (that is, to create emotional connections) is one of our deepest and most automatic instincts; it's a basis of our survival. We need to matter to other people, so we absolutely need safe, emotional, connections.

Using EFT and other models, Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment's Oakville psychologists help provide a sense of safety in couples' and family sessions, de-escalating conflicts and helping disengaged members to re-engage. There is no blame within our therapies, only efforts to bring partners and family members closer together so they can communicate what they really need from the relationship.

Often, this takes the form of 'translating' behaviours. For example, a husband might withdraw from his wife, seeing her angry face and hearing, "You're never around!" We would work to help both partners appreciate what might be the

wife's *true* meaning, that is, protesting what she feels is the emotional distance between them, as if to say, "You're SO important to me, but your distance feels like you don't need me." Shift psychologists understand that humans use detachment for emotional protection (e.g., "You can't hurt me if I don't allow myself to care.") and focus on rebuilding damaged connections with the people we love and care about.

The video below, called the "Still Face Experiment: Dr. Edward Tronick" demonstrates a fundamental aspect of being human: the need to bond. The video shows a mother interacting with her happy baby. When the mother (instructed by researchers) shows the baby a still face—one that looks at the baby but shows no signs of really 'seeing' her—the baby quickly becomes distressed and tries everything she can to regain the connection with her mother. When allowed to interact again, the mother soothes the child, almost instantly, with a broad smile and the reassurance, "I'm here."

Emotional separation triggers panic in mammals, while emotional connections release hormones that stimulate happiness and calm. Infant brains activate connection triggers by creating mental images of caregivers to think of when alone and upset. Adult brains continue to do this, but often transfer the power to soothe from their parents to their partners. While it's normal for people in close relationships to argue, conflicts become problematic when members turn away, leaving the others feeling alone and unable to find comfort. In fact, the biological need for safe, emotional connections is so great that loneliness can increase blood pressure to the point where it can double the risk of heart attack and stroke in marital partners. Our therapy work is intended to help partners and families remain engaged. Feeling safe and secure with our loved ones, we can resolve almost any issue together.

Connections with others is critical. By helping couples to observe the patterns and vicious cycles that promote fear and

distance between them, partners becomes better able to slow down their own reactions and allow more time to reflect on what each person needs within the relationship. EFT is useful for all couples, as well as family groups. We never lose that need to connect with the people we value, and that is at the heart of the couples and family therapies offered at Shift.

Click [here](#) to contact the clinic about help for problems in your relationships.

[The Importance of Self-Regulation](#)



[CBC Radio](#)'s program [Ideas](#) aired a fascinating documentary on [June 16](#) about the importance of helping children develop their capacity to self-regulate. The broad category of 'self-regulation' refers to a group of abilities that includes being aware of and able to change emotional states, moving the focus of attention from any one thing to any other thing, and controlling impulses long enough to get beyond momentary frustrations. Children who

can't regulate their behaviour effectively in a classroom, who can't 'switch gears' and change their focus from recess back to math when the bell rings, and who can't calm themselves when they feel stressed will struggle to fit in. Rejection from peers and disapproval from adults can be painful and lead to children internalizing the labels of being 'broken' and unwelcome, leading to needless suffering over the long-term.

The documentary featured psychologist and child development expert [Dr. Stuart Shanker](#), who spoke about how [rates of anxiety are on the rise](#) in North American children. He speculated that might be related to pre-birth factors influencing brain development in utero, like maternal stress and exposure to neurotoxins, and also to the overuse of TV and video games, which “capture attention but do nothing to waken the senses.” Physical, emotional or sexual abuse in childhood can also leave a child’s defense systems on high alert.

Regardless of how it may come about, an overactive nervous system arouses the body’s [fight-flight systems](#) to the point where, in extreme cases, the ability to self-regulate and shut off arousal can become overworked. In Dr. Shanker’s terms, it’s like having a car’s gas pedal pushed to the floor for so long that the car loses the ability to brake.

A brain that is stressed (or over-aroused) will protect itself by conserving energy, shutting down other areas of functionality that aren’t required for life-support, like the frontal lobes. We use the frontal lobes for problem-solving, planning how to make our way through challenges, and for regulating our emotions. See the problem? Children who are overstressed or unable to self-regulate effectively may find themselves unable to use the very parts of the brain that are needed to get along with others, solve complex academic problems like school assignments and social puzzles, like figuring out how to take a bathroom break when the teacher holds the hall pass. From this perspective, self-regulation is at the heart of a child’s ability to learn and function socially. Whereas hyper-aroused states turn on our alarm systems, calm states turn them off, reengaging our attention and learning systems, and enabling us to get something out of education and our time at school. This is at the heart of Shanker’s approach to helping kids self-regulate.

Shanker proposes that there's no such thing as 'a bad kid,' and points out how people often judge and label children who struggle to fit in. It's important, he says, for all the adults in a child's life (that is, family, teachers and others) to be able to recognize and appreciate what that child is doing to self-regulate. For example, some kids need to move around to think; others may fidget as a way to self-soothe. While they may not look like they're listening, they usually are. Other kids need time alone to collect themselves when they feel overwhelmed. It's important to see those behaviours for what they are, namely strategies for coping with anxiety and stress, because hostility and inflexibility from adults only makes it worse. A solid [psychological assessment](#) can help parents and teachers understand a given child's strengths and areas that need to be strengthened further.



Listen to the documentary yourself [here](#). Check out Shanker's book on helping children learn to self-regulate: [Calm, Alert And Learning: Classroom Strategies For Self-regulation](#) .

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Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment Oakville is a psychology practice that helps kids and parents succeed.