

Caregiver Coloring Book

and the Practice of Mindfulness

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Caregivers must look after themselves if they are to continue to care for and support someone else. Due to the difficult nature of their role, caregivers are at risk of developing mental health issues. One thing that has been shown to have a positive impact on the mental state of caregivers is mindfulness.



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What is Mindfulness?

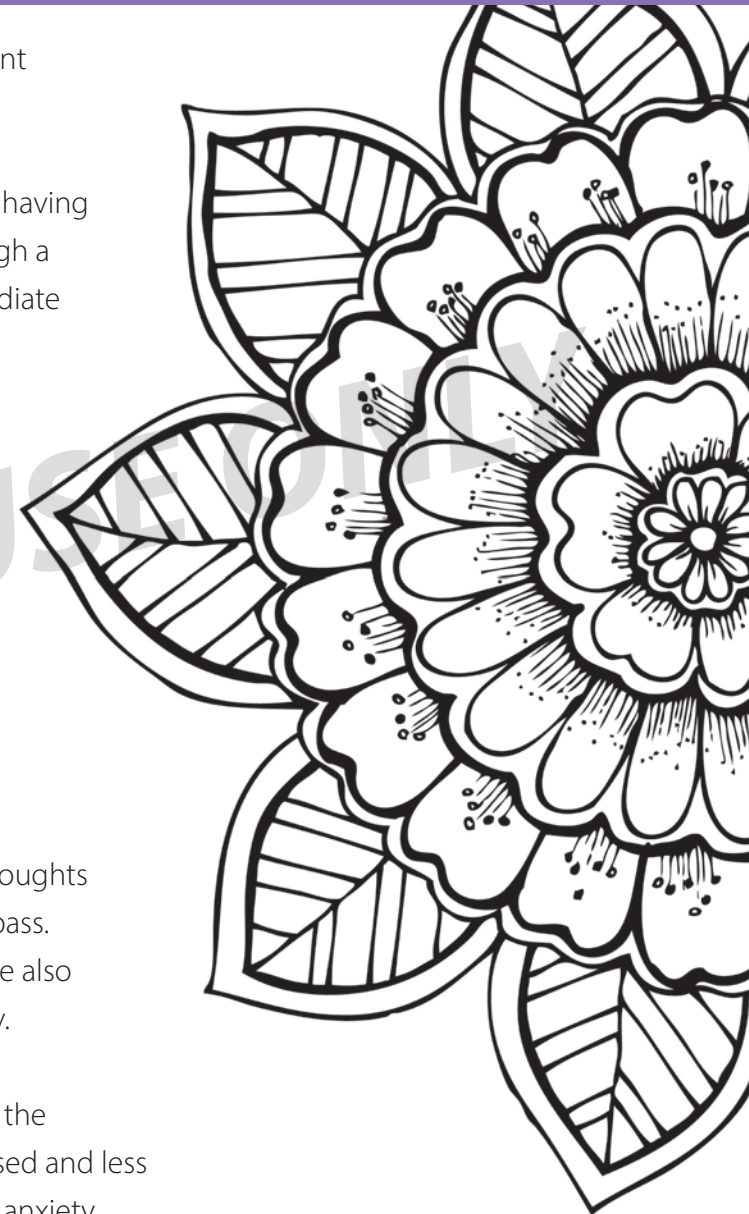
Mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.

The purpose of mindfulness is to focus on the present and to avoid dwelling on the past or having anxious thoughts about the future. It's about seeing the world for how it is instead of through a clouded lens of negative thoughts and emotions. The focus should be placed on the immediate surroundings and sensations, while simply letting any thoughts and feelings come and go without getting lost in them.

Mindfulness practice can be looked at as a form of meditation. It simply consists of sitting down in a comfortable, quiet area for a set period of time, closing the eyes, and focusing on things like the sounds in the room, the way the body feels, and the way the breath moves in and out. No special equipment is required and even spending 5-10 minutes per day on it can provide benefits. The non-judgmental aspect of mindfulness is essential – it's important not to worry about “doing it right” or getting frustrated if the mind wanders.

Some may think that the goal is to avoid thoughts, but thinking is part of human nature. Thoughts and feelings will come and go, but it's important to simply notice them and then let them pass. Attention should be brought back to the body and the breath when the mind wanders. One also should not try to control the breath, but simply be aware of how it feels to breathe naturally.

A gentle approach is the best way to engage in the practice of mindfulness. By focusing on the present moment rather than past mistakes or future worries, the mind becomes more focused and less stressed. This is especially beneficial for caregivers who may suffer from high-stress levels or anxiety .

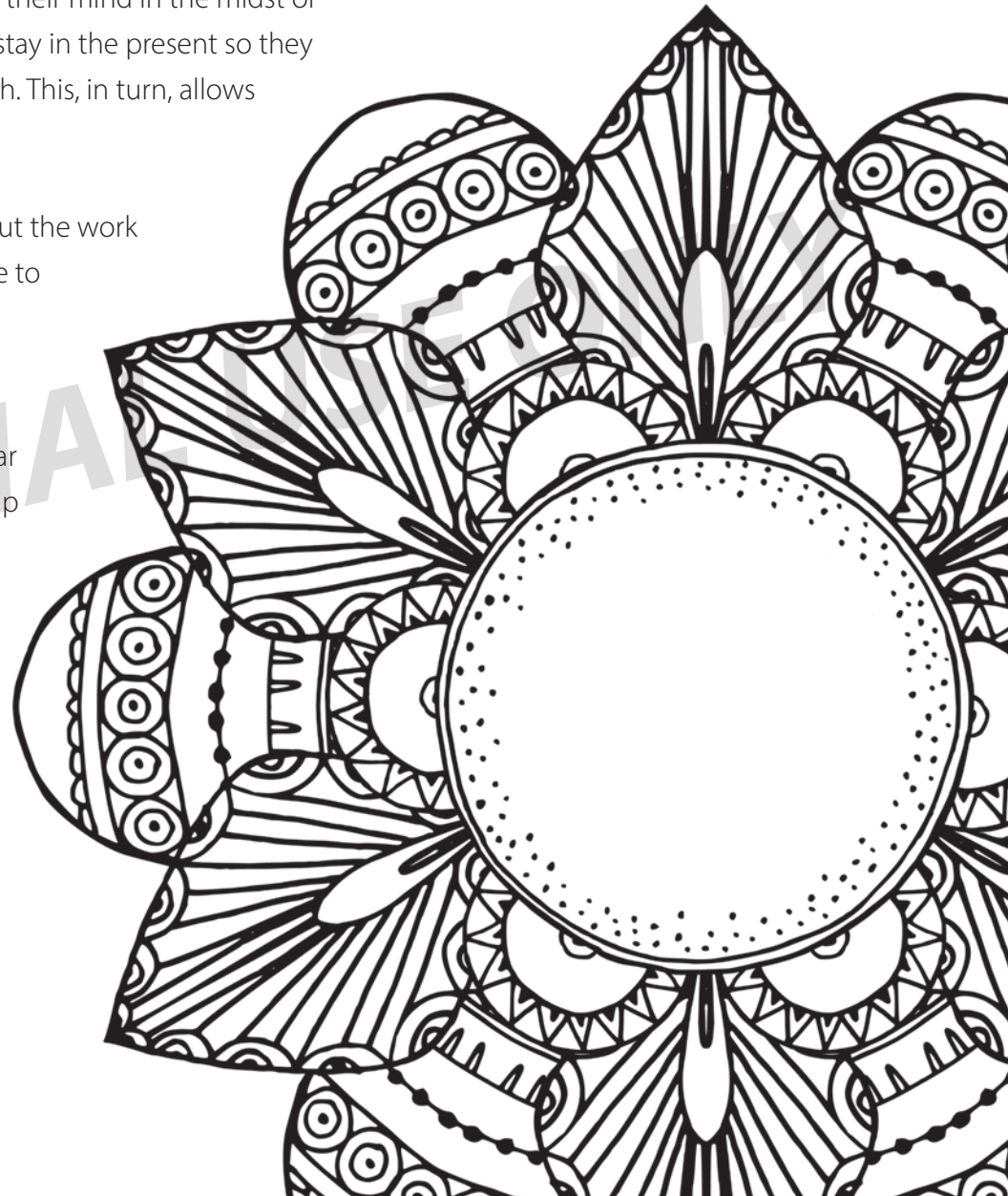


How Can Mindfulness be Useful for Caregivers?

Mindfulness is useful in helping caregivers centre themselves and clear their mind in the midst of an emotional and demanding workload. Mindfulness helps caregivers stay in the present so they can manage their negative emotions and build their emotional strength. This, in turn, allows them to care for their loved ones more effectively.

Mindfulness is useful in helping caregivers think and ask questions about the work that they're doing. Sometimes, caregivers work too hard to provide care to their loved ones and end up working past their limits. This can lead to burnout and other negative consequences.

Caregiving can be difficult physically and mentally. It is not like a regular 9-5 job where you leave your work at the end of the day. It is easy to slip into a 24 hour on call role when caring for a loved one with a serious illness or disability. Although it can be difficult to step away it is important to find moments to relax the mind and body in order to prevent burnout. This is where mindfulness can be a valuable tool. By being mindful and intentional about the care that's being provided, caregivers can stop and think about whether they're overworking themselves, and whether they should slow things down. Trying to do too much may seem like it would be helpful for a loved one, but it ends up hurting them in the long run due to the negative impacts on the caregiver.



How Does Mindfulness Affect Mental Health?

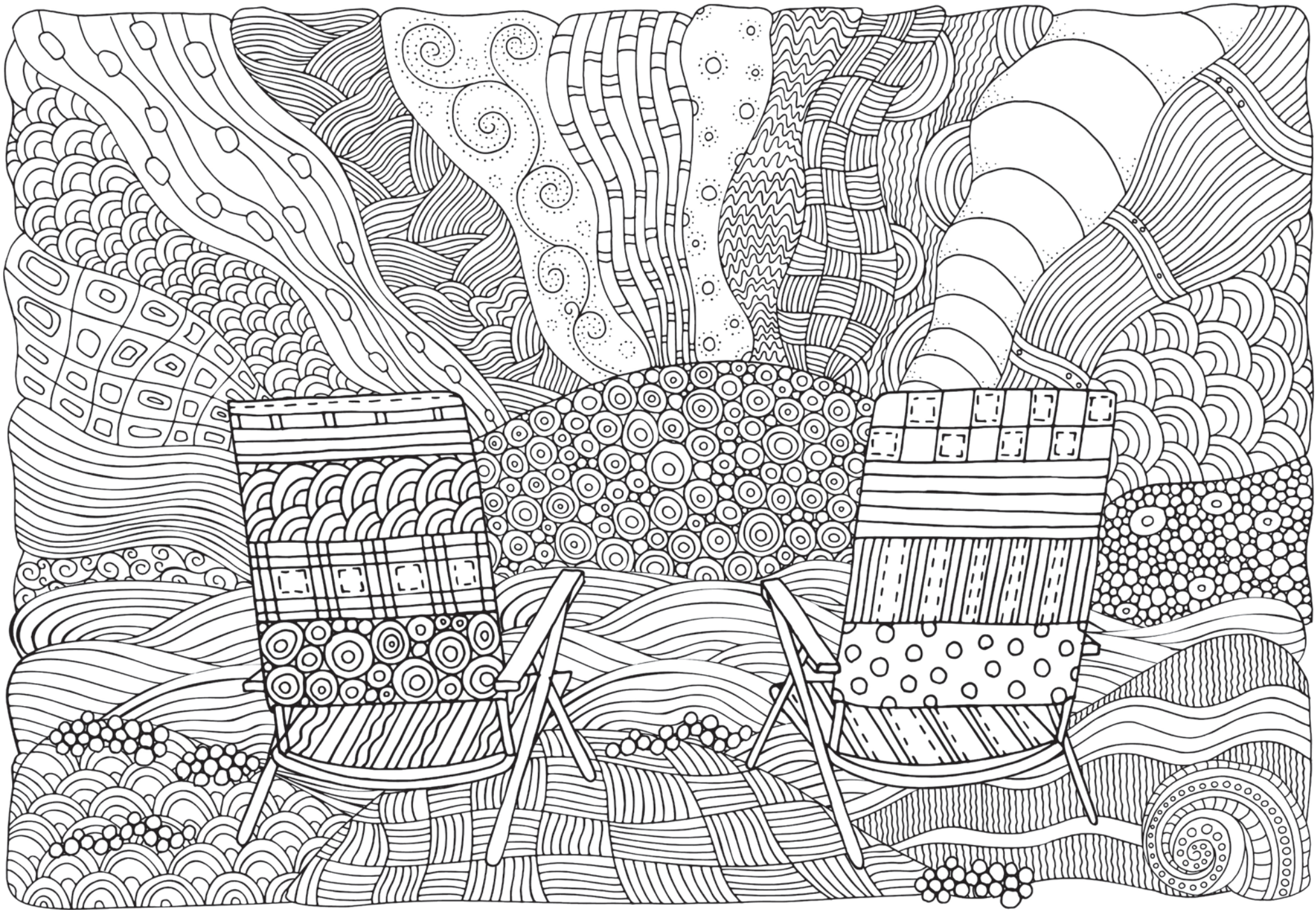
Mindfulness techniques can improve caregiver's mental well-being by decreasing feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress. Mindfulness techniques can also improve one's attention and emotional processing, which will help caregivers continue in their vital role. The best part about mindfulness is that it's simple, free, and doesn't require a large time commitment.

What does Coloring have to do with Mindfulness?

Believe it or not you can color away your stress. Coloring is a popular way to easily engage in a mindfulness practice. The activity of coloring is a simple way to enhance focus, to be present in the moment and thus can reduce anxiety. It is similar to other mindful practices in that it is possible to get into an almost meditative state that slows your breathing and heightens your focus on the present. Because of its calming effects it can be an important part of caregiver self-care. Another benefit of coloring is that its calming and relaxing effect can be experienced within minutes with no training, equipment or timely set up required. So enjoy the following pages, relax and color away your stress.







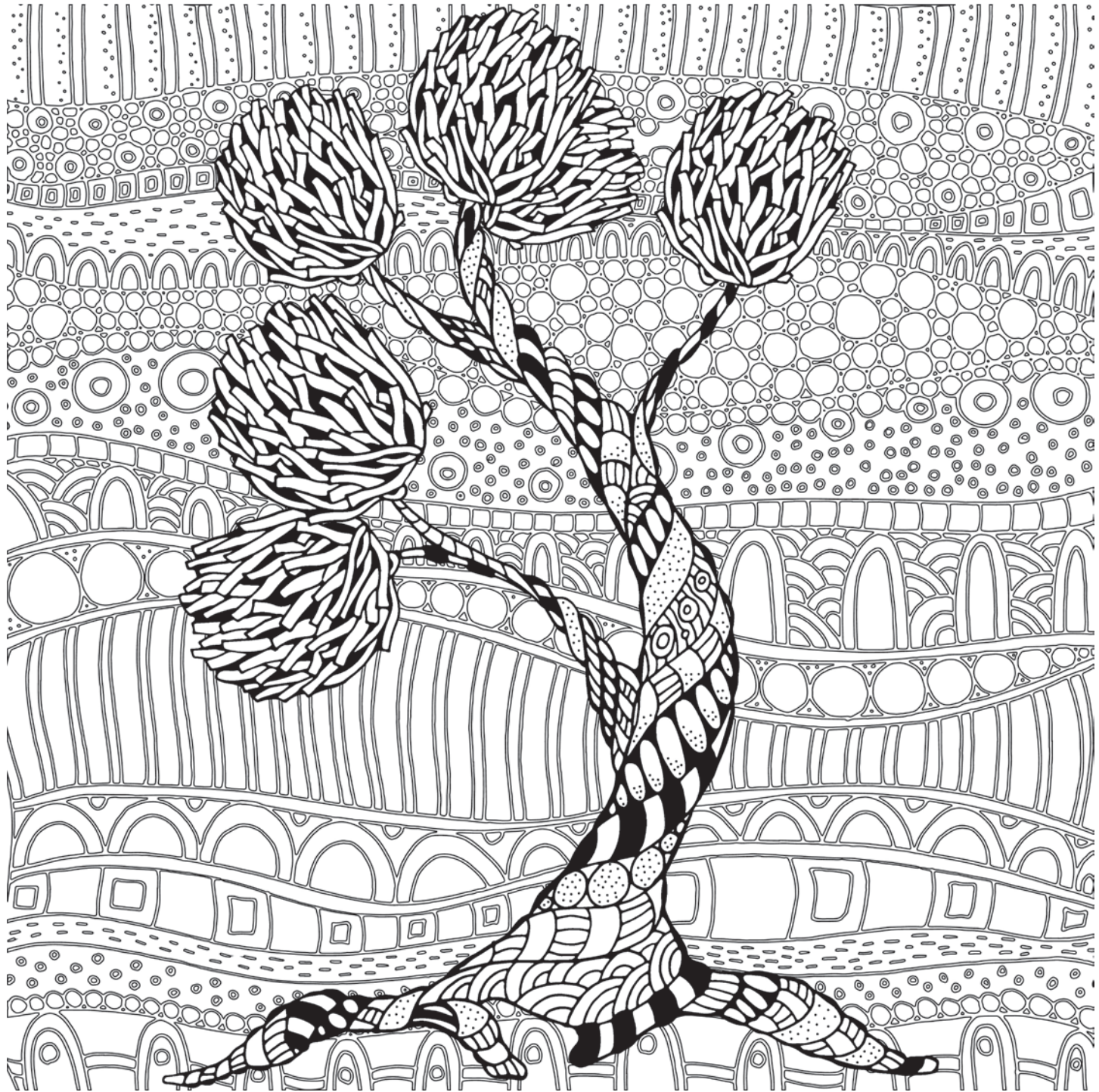












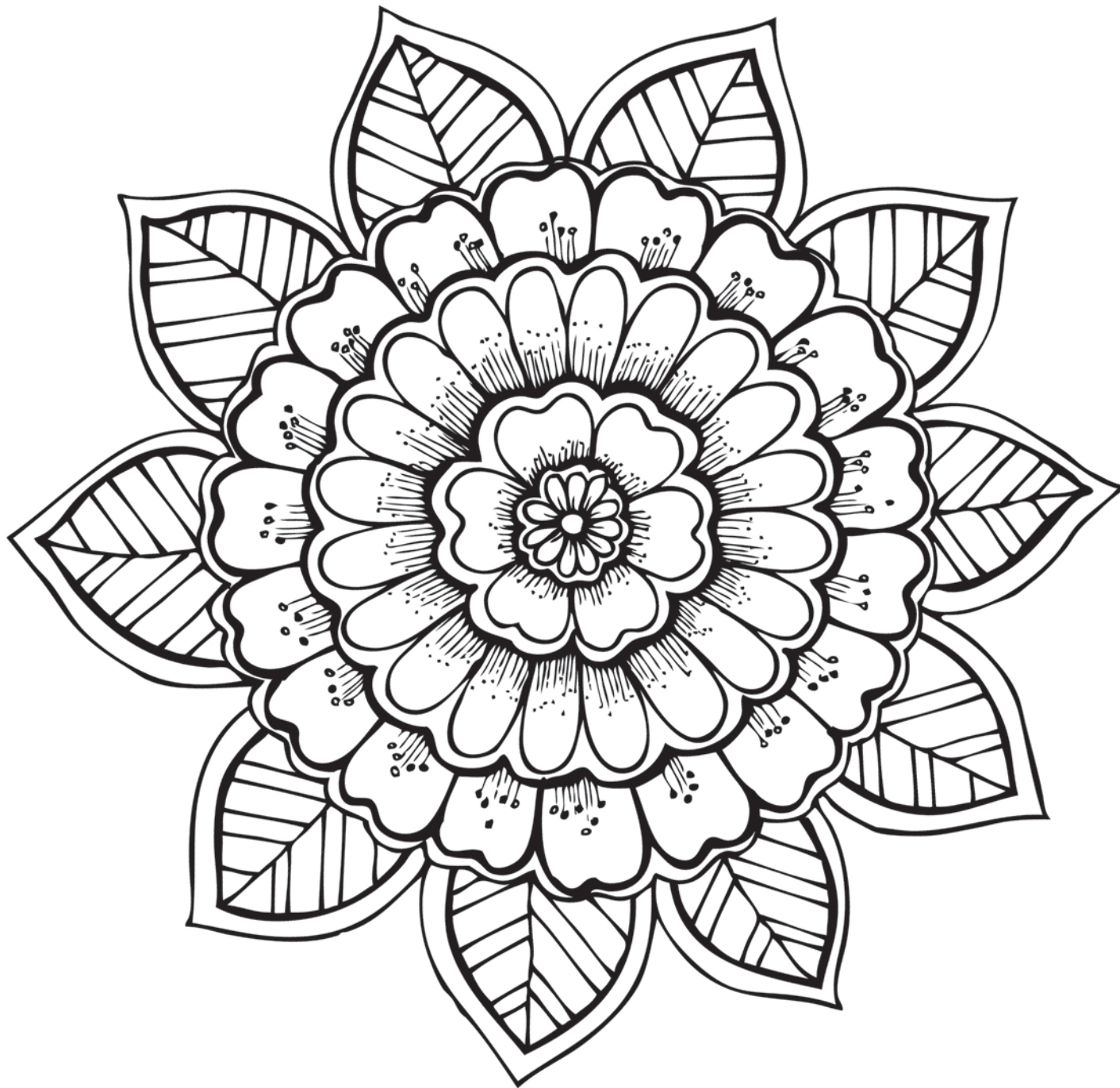


Being in
the Now

Living moment by moment and seeing everything afresh without judgement and worry lets us experience life rather than simply get through it.



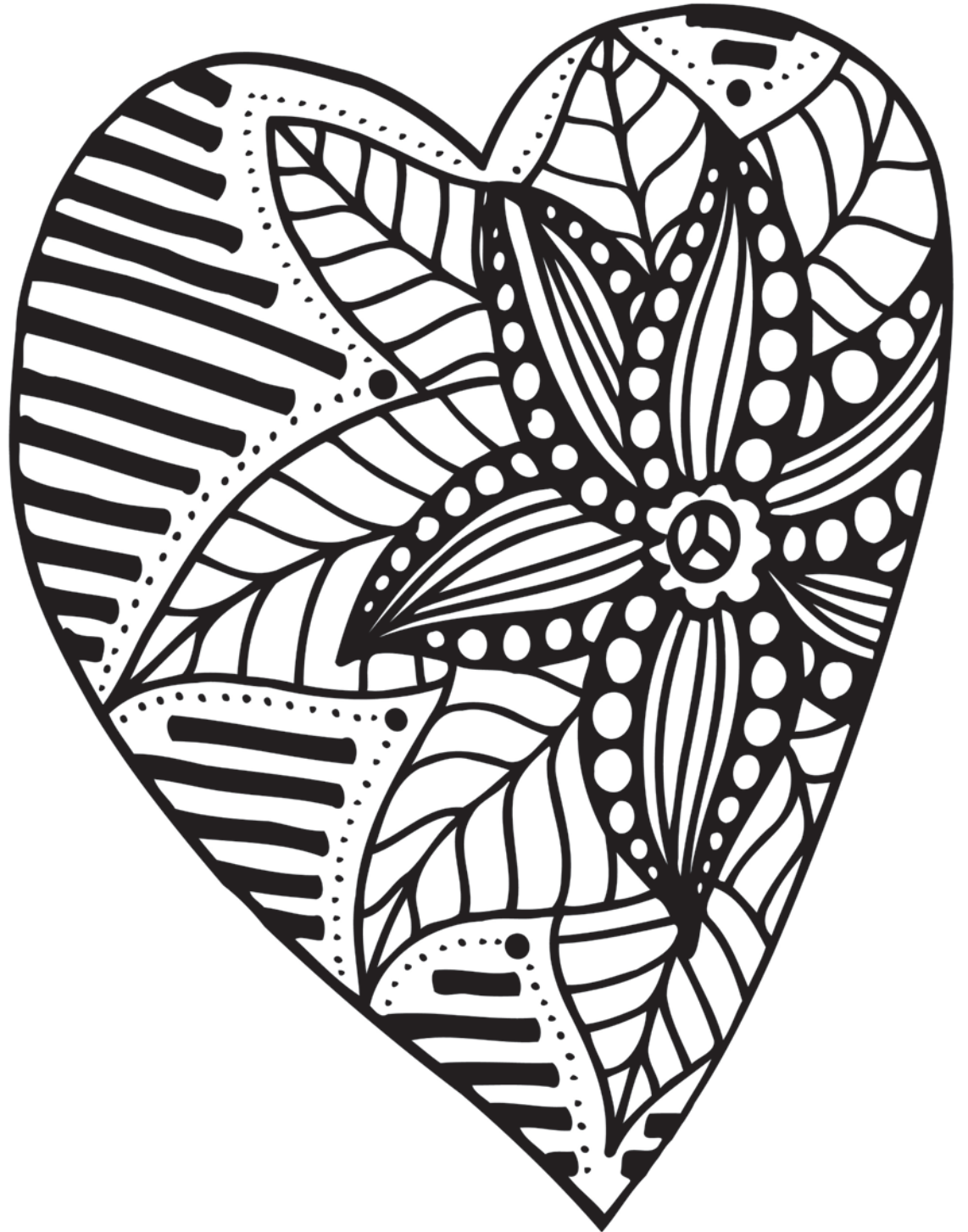
Seeking Calm



Simple mindfulness practices engage the mind and the body, helping you to let go and slowly bringing you back to a sense of balance and peace.

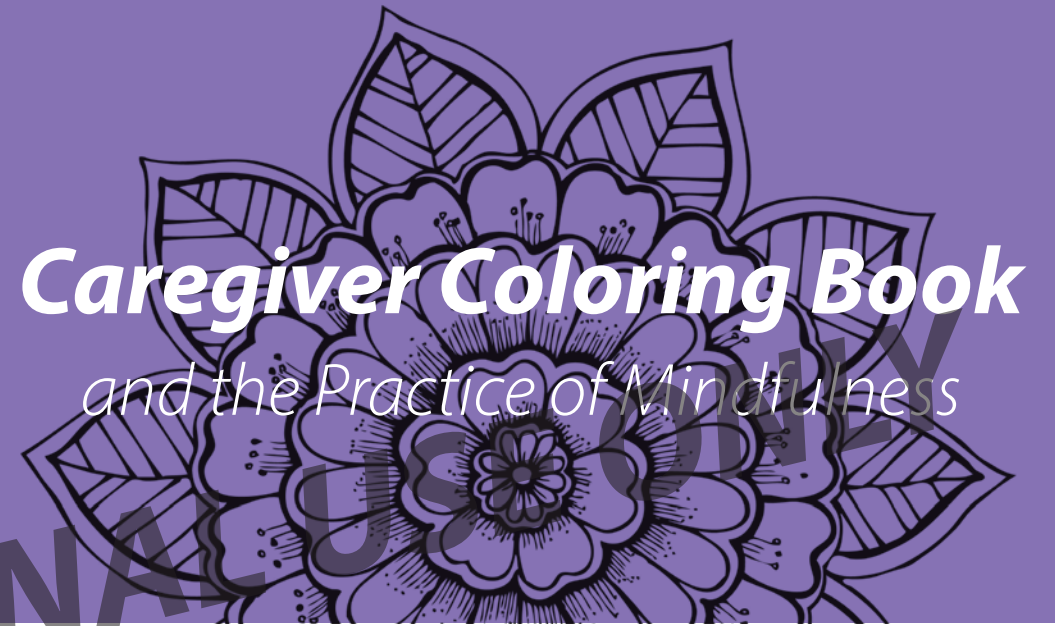
Awareness

Entering a state of 'being' rather than 'doing' can release us from worry and help us deal with each moment as it arises. With this calmness we can move toward acceptance of how things are.





Tobi Johnston M.A., M.S.W., R.S.W, is the Executive Director of the Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors and a pioneer in the field of caregiver mental health and wellness. Her speciality and focus is creating therapeutic tools for family caregivers to assist them in caring for aging loved ones. She is the author of *Care At Home: An Organizational Tool for Family Caregivers* and the *Caregivers Self-Care Workbook*. Her most recent publication is the *Caregiver Coloring Book* and the *Practice of Mindfulness*.



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