

The practice of doing nothing

By [Teri McDowell Ott](#)

December 2, 2015

I caught myself getting overwhelmed one night. I'd been distracting myself from my stress all day long—running from meeting to meeting, answering emails, sending e-mails, moving from one uncompleted task on my desk to the next. When I finally got home and needed to focus on my children, though, I no longer had the energy to distract myself. So the stress I had successfully avoided all day slowly began to unravel itself and take over.

The power of emotion is extraordinary. I felt the stress coming, could clearly see the effect it was having on me, and yet still felt powerless to stop it. As it built I tried not to let it effect my time with my children—but it did. I was impatient, angry, short, and instantly regretful. But what could I do in the face of an emotion that was tightening my chest and making my heart beat so wildly? How could I possibly stop this avalanche? I was losing the battle. I was coming undone.

Then, I remembered the advice of Andy Puddicombe, the meditation guru from [Headspace](#), saying something about the problem of resisting emotion. I remembered him talking about how, if we were to stop resisting the emotion that is causing us stress, then we will stop fueling that emotion. I was having a hard time understanding this lesson of Andy's until that night.

When my stress reached the verge of overwhelming, I decided to give Andy's advice a try. I sat down on my meditation mat, mala beads in hand, and stopped resisting—I stopped fighting the emotion within me. I allowed it to simply be while I breathed in and out. Almost instantly, I felt my stress lose a lot of its energy. And I realized I had been fueling it all day with my active resistance. Also, when I sat with my stress (it honestly felt like I was honoring it, like I was giving this emotion its due) it parsed itself out. It revealed itself as not just the generic term *stress* but more specifically as sadness, self-doubt, and the fear of failure.

Ten minutes later, I was reaping the benefits of this extraordinary practice. I still felt stress, but I was not overwhelmed. I was not undone. And I was much more aware of

the source of my stress—which will make it easier the next time it, inevitably, comes around.

Originally posted at [Something to Say](#)