

The ABCs to Minding Your Mind

A guide to achieving small but powerfully incremental shifts in your mind and lifestyle with **Dr. Rheeda Walker**



THE ABCS TO MINDING YOUR MIND

In *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health*, I introduce the ABCs of genuinely connecting with someone who could be struggling emotionally. Those ABCs are:

- A**ssume you can help
- B**e present
- C**ancel your judgment

You don't have to get in your friend or loved one's business, but you do have to be intentional about how you connect with someone who could be at risk for a crisis.

Sometimes professional help is needed, but many in our community don't get that help. Meanwhile, feeling seen and valued offsets the emotional toxins that can lead your loved ones to a mental breakdown or worse.

But what about you?

Before you extend yourself to someone else in need, be mindful of your own emotional journey.

- Is family stressing you out?
- Are you feeling the weight of work stress?
- Are you tired of subtle racism at work?
- Are you already slacking on your New Year goals to eat better, get fit and rest more?
- Do you find yourself persistently dissatisfied with how your life is going?

Any one of these circumstances would weigh heavily on you. The accumulation of them may be more burdensome than you know.

You need your own ABCs to help you mind your mind.



Assume that circumstances can be different in your own life

You get caught in never ending circles—so much so that you don't see a way out. Meaningful change can take time, but set your mind to thinking that your life can be different.

Take a moment now to visualize how your life might be different:

- You have 30 minutes to yourself each day.
- You work in a setting where you are embraced for your unique talents and all of who you are.
- You feel more rested because you get 7 hours of sleep each night.

What would meaningful change *feel* like for you? Sit with this.

You have to take a sincere moment for your visualization (like at least the length of time of your favorite Beyonce or Kendrick Lamar song). We see it so often in our work with therapy clients. Experiential awareness is so much more convincing than cognitive insight because it makes a difference when you experience something relative to when you think simply think about it. You can keep your goals at a safe (unattainable) distance until you feel what it's like to have what you want. On a cognitive level, you can imagine that it would be nice to have a quiet beach vacation. Once you start to imagine what the beach is like, you can't wait to book your flight and get to packing.

You have spent enough time thinking about what you want to be different. Take a moment to connect to a different level of knowing. Assuming that your circumstances can be different will set you on a path to creating specific and attainable goals.

Assume you deserve to live a happier life.



Be present for yourself

If you want more time for yourself, what would you do in that time?

Perhaps envision your 15 minutes in the morning and your 15 minutes in the evening: Imagine yourself quietly sipping your favorite coffee on the balcony or a quiet room. Before bedtime, write down what you feel good about having accomplished for the day. Keep a small notebook where you can jot down what you would want to do differently the next day.

So often, you run around like a headless chicken without being present for yourself. In the shower, you think about everything that went wrong and who got on your nerves. Instead, your shower can be your time to feel the relaxing, warm water on your back and shoulders. If you have a job where you can go in late so you can be in the shower for 20 minutes and your water bill can handle it... stay in the shower! Pick a Wednesday for a midweek boost. Use scented shower gel every day. Resist the urge to wait for special occasions. Every day is a special day for you to **celebrate** you.

Life Hack:

Taking time to be present for yourself makes chaos less overwhelming. Repeat: taking time for yourself makes chaos less overwhelming.

You may be living in so much chaos that you have grown comfortable with it. But if your circumstances can't change, you have to change so that the chaos around you doesn't take you out.

Before you log onto your computer, try my 9 minute deep breathing exercise. Research shows that the strain of discrimination is associated with depression, aging, sickness, and even premature death for Black Americans.

As you mind your mind and the cumulative impact of stress, know that you can begin to reset your body's stress response with routine deep breathing.



Cancel your judgment about what will not work for you

You may convince yourself that “things aren’t that bad”. Meanwhile, your psychological fortitude rating (your rating of how well you are taking care of your responsibilities, managing your emotions, and tapping into your life purpose while staving off threats) is “5” all day most days on a scale from 0-10. We all have good days and bad days, but you want to be able to sprinkle in some 8’s and 9’s. Ignoring your routine 5’s by minimizing your stress is poor judgment.

Resist ‘Should’

The biggest way that you judge yourself is using the word ‘should’. Most of us should on ourselves all day. You may say things like “I shouldn’t let what she said get to me.” “I should be able to deal with my family—other people have it worse than I do”.

One thing that is inherent in the ‘should’ is a comparison to others. Because someone else is managing generational trauma, living an unhealthy lifestyle, and enduring mistreatment at work, you tell yourself you should be able to handle your situation. You tell yourself you have big goals and you should be able to do it all. The reality is that you’re too TIRED to handle it all.

Begin With A New Mindset

You also judge what you think isn’t going to work. You do this before you even try something new. You see yoga as something that white people do as if you don’t deserve the benefits of yoga. If it helps, find an online instructor who looks like you. You deserve the benefits of mindful breathing, stretching your body, and extending yourself to a different source of peace.

Life is about experimenting so you can see the cause and effect of something new. You cannot know what works for you until you initiate a new strategy and see the fruits of your effort. Begin with a new mindset. You are conditioned to push through no matter what. You learned this from the generations before you. But what if there are new ways to push? Don’t assume that things will always be the same and that you have to struggle because your nana did. Be present for your own psychological fortitude. In a world that already judges and sometimes devalues you, the last thing you want is to limit your own opportunities to live a life you can enjoy.

If you need new tools in your tool belt, it’s time to experiment with something different!





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Dr. Rheeda Walker is a clinical psychologist, award-winning professor, and a leading scholar who has published more than 60 scientific papers on African American mental health, suicide risk, and emotional resilience.

Dr. Walker's impact has expanded beyond academia with the release of her first book, *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health*. Dr. Walker debunks myths about mental health, builds the case for psychological fortitude, and delivers practical advice for use in everyday life.

Her charismatic vision and practical approach to life's challenges has led to numerous appearances on *Good Morning America*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *NPR* to name a few. Her expertise has been cited in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Houston Chronicle* among others.