



# Pause & Begin Again

**How Busy Professionals Can Start and Restart a Meditation Practice**

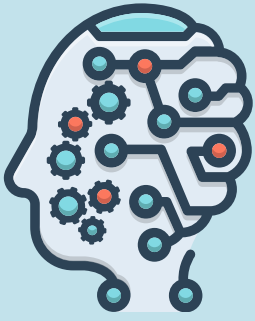
By Claire E. Parsons, Esq.



# About This Ebook

I am frequently asked to present on mindfulness practice for legal organizations and other professionals. With the COVID-19 pandemic, most of those requests have been for virtual presentations. This ebook represents my attempts to evolve with the times and adjust to the circumstances. Though PowerPoint is an excellent tool, I find that it minimizes engagement with virtual presentations. To address that, I created this ebook as a guide for audiences to refer to during presentations. Of course, it has the added benefit that audience members can use it as an easy-to-read resource after the presentation.

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# What Is Mindfulness?

Pioneering researcher Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as follows:



Paying attention



On purpose



In the present moment



Nonjudgmentally

# Mindfulness Is Not



A magic bullet solution

Easy

The same as meditation

A religion

A mindset/viewpoint

Just hype/a fad

Something that requires a lot  
of time/money

# Benefits of Meditation



Increase focus



Manage stress



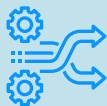
Enhance EQ



Reduce rumination

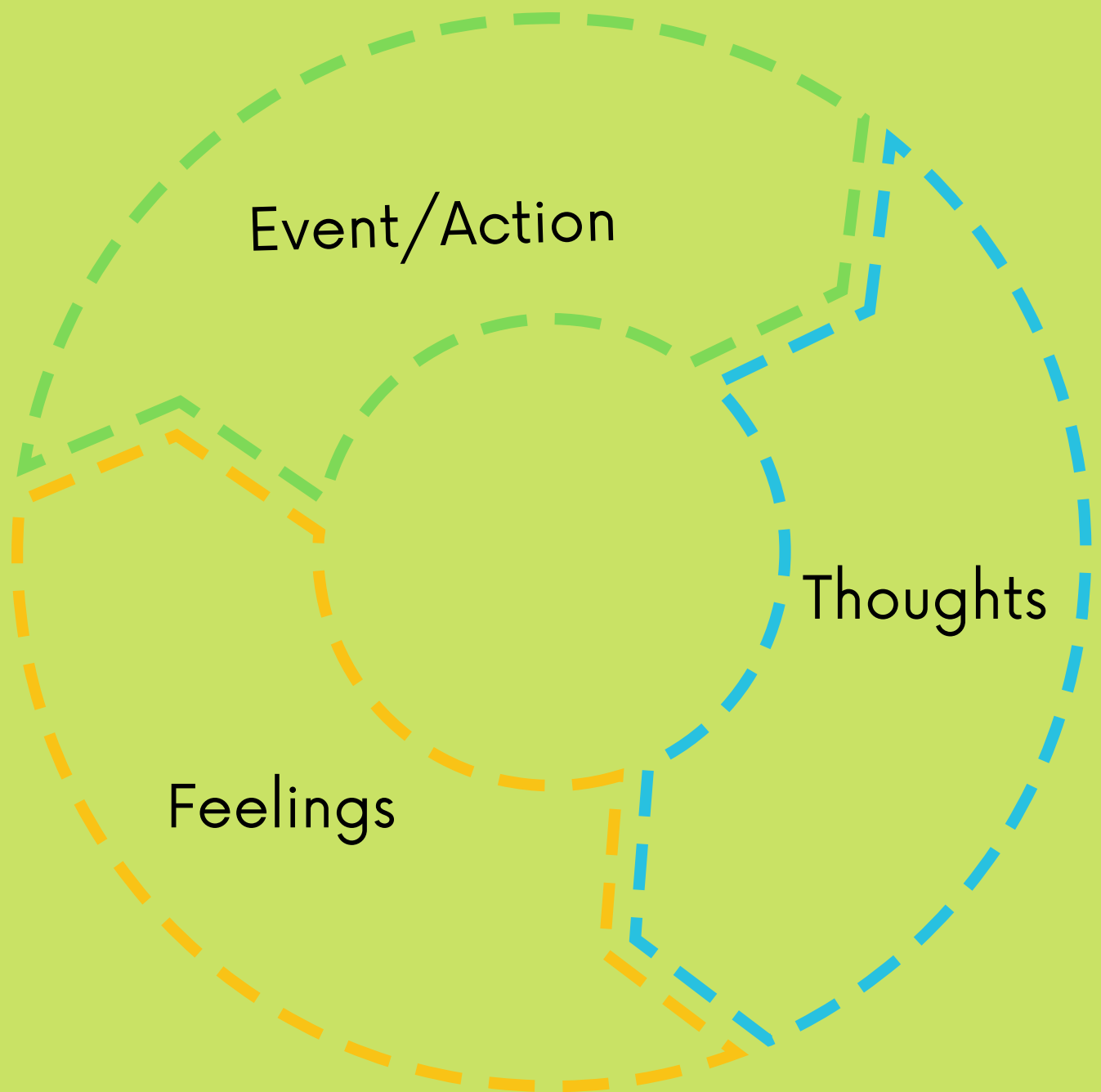


Activate intuition



Accept change

# Chain of Reactivity

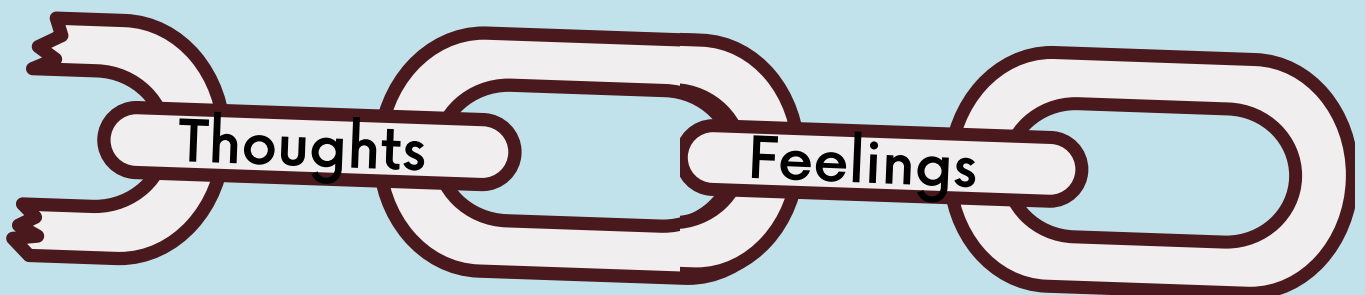


# Breaking the Chain



What's happening now?

What do I feel in my body?



# Should I Start Now?



Meditation is not a substitute for mental health treatment or support for family and friends.

Meditation is intended to reduce suffering.

Don't turn it into another "should" that makes you feel bad about yourself.





# How much?

# How often?



Daily practice is best to establish a habit.



Start with 1-2 minutes.



Increase gradually over time.



Longer periods at the outset may present risk that you will (a) struggle to find the time, (b) find the sessions difficult, and (c) ultimately just give up.

# Meditation Styles



Breath Practice



Loving-Kindness



Body Scan



Mantra



Visualization



Walking Meditation

# Breath Practice

The instructions are as simple as the name suggests: focus on the feeling of your breath going in and out and nonjudgmentally return your focus to your breath



breath when you notice your mind drift. Each time you notice your mind wandering, you increase your capacity to pay attention. Moreover, the more you practice meditation, the better your body and mind will associate relaxation and focus

with the breath. Over time, the simple act of sitting and breathing for a few minutes will help you build calm and peace even on days when your focus is lacking.

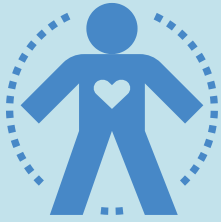
Different teachers recommend different focal points. Some traditions instruct students to focus on the tip of one's nose to feel the flow of air in and out. Others recommend focusing on the feeling of rising and falling in the chest or belly as the air fills your lungs. In the early stages, pick the area you feel most strongly, and play with different options as your practice evolves.

# Loving-Kindness

Loving-kindness (or metta as it is traditionally referred to) is a practice intended to help us practice opening our hearts to others. With this practice, one brings to mind different people or groups of people and, while focusing attention on one's own body (usually in the area of the heart), sends kind wishes to each one. Most traditional forms of this practice begin with oneself, then call to mind a loved one, then a benefactor (a teacher, mentor, or friend), a neutral person, and a difficult person. Most practices conclude with sending these same wishes to your household, local community, region, nation, and the entire world.

Many struggle with this practice because they feel it is unnatural to send love to themselves. Over time, however, research has shown that this practice can transform how one relates to oneself and one's community.





# Body Scan

This style of practice focuses on the sensations in one's body in a systematic way rather than exclusively focusing on the breath. Generally, body scan meditations start at the crown of the head and proceed down to other parts of the body systematically. There are, however, many potential methods and starting points for body scans. Regardless of the particular method you try, the object of a body scan meditation is to feel the sensations in the body and notice what you feel, rather than to think about the body.

Body scan meditation can be less intimidating to new meditators because the practice is more active than breath practice. Because your mind has to work a bit more to stay focused on the sensations in the body, it may not seem as hard to keep the mind engaged with the focal point as it does in the early phases of learning breath practice. In addition, because you are paying attention to the physical condition of the body, you may notice areas of tension and learn to relax them during the meditation. This can be deeply relaxing even in a short period of time.

# Mantra

Life is good

Carpe diem!

be yourself

A mantra is a word or short phrase that is repeated over and over again in order to relax the mind. It can be repeated in the mind or verbally spoken. Those who practice mantra meditation often experience a meditative state after a period of repetition. Some experienced meditators develop their own mantra or are given one by a teacher after a period of practice.

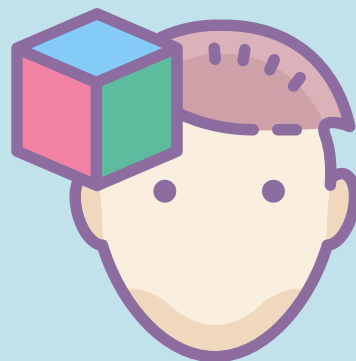
It is not necessary to have any specific type of mantra, but it is helpful to keep the phrase short. Something as simple as "I am here" may be enough. It may be most effective, however, to select a mantra and use it for several days or weeks before trying a new one.

One common device is to pair part of the mantra with the breath. For example, you might say "I am" on the in breath and "here" on the out breath. To start, all you need to do is select a phrase and try it out. The phrase can be meaningful or nonsensical, so long as it helps you explore the method and relax.

# Visualization

Visualization meditations use imagery and stories to encourage relaxation, inspire and motivate, or move past mental blocks. Visualization strategies can be very simple, such as a "mountain" meditation which can cultivate equanimity, poise, and calm. Or, they can be complex and embedded in a specific situation, such as visualizing a job interview in order to prepare oneself mentally for the real-life experience.

It is possible to try simple visualization meditations on your own, but they are most effective with the assistance of a guided meditation. In times of significant stress, visualization meditations can be very welcome because they offer a brief respite from present circumstances. For this same reason, visualization meditations can be an excellent way to add variety and new learnings to your meditation practice.





# Walking Meditation

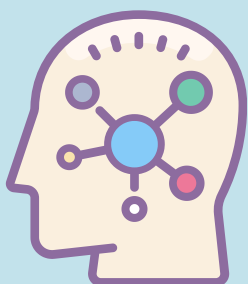
Beginners often find walking meditation to be awkward and strange. With this style, the meditator walks or moves slowly and intentionally, striving to maintain focus on one's feet and movements. The trick is to move slowly enough to notice each motion or shifting of weight, but not so slowly that you lose your balance.

In retreats, walking meditation is used to provide a break from long periods of sitting meditation and allow for necessary self-care, including meals. It can also be used for shorter periods to ensure that the body does not become uncomfortable or the mind too dull after sitting for periods exceeding 20 minutes.

Though walking meditation can seem difficult, it is very effective at encouraging the maintenance of present moment awareness during one's daily life. Thus, if practiced sufficiently, walking meditation may help you notice when your mind trails off even when you are not meditating.

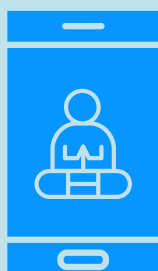


# What Do I Need to Start?



You don't "need" anything but your mind and a few moments.

A timer and a comfortable seat help.



Meditation apps or other guided meditations are great.



# Common Problems



Can't Sit Still



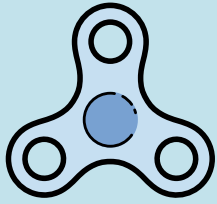
Can't Clear Your Mind



Bored or Drowsy



Worry It Isn't Working



# Can't Sit Still



It's best to avoid moving so you can focus but you are allowed to move.

Check your position. Is it comfortable?



Wait it out. See if the urge to move passes.

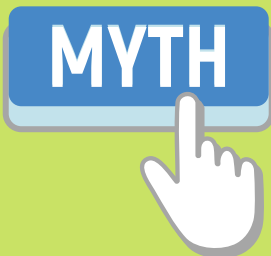
Try another style.





# Can't Clear Your Mind

This is normal. It means your mind is perfect.



Meditation is not about clearing your mind.

It is about creating a space between you and your thoughts.



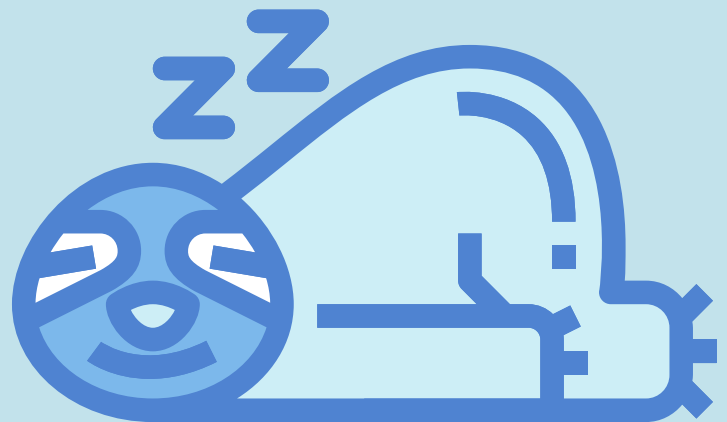
The object is not to get rid of thoughts but instead to watch them arise and fade away.

# Bored or Drowsy?

This happens to everyone.

Most likely, you just (a) need more sleep, (b) are affected by the time of day, (c) ate a big meal, or (d) are bored.

Options include (a) opening your eyes; (b) standing/sitting up; (c) removing layers, (d) taking a nap, and (e) trying a new style of meditation .





# Is This Even Working???

Common signs that your meditation practice is helping:

Rushing less?

Noticing your thoughts more?

Responding instead of reacting?

Fewer physical signs of stress?

More aware of others' feelings?

Happier? More at peace?

# Restart Your Meditation Practice in 7 STEPS

1. Do not judge yourself.
2. If needed, share challenges with a loved one.
3. Remember all the benefits that meditation has offered to your life.
4. Identify what caused the problem with your practice.
5. Try something new (style, teacher, or guided meditation).
6. Commit to 5 minutes a day and let it grow.
7. Notice when it feels good to meditate again.





# Free Guided Meditations

Ten Percent Happier Live and Mindful@Home each have an online catalog of free meditations created to help during the coronavirus pandemic.

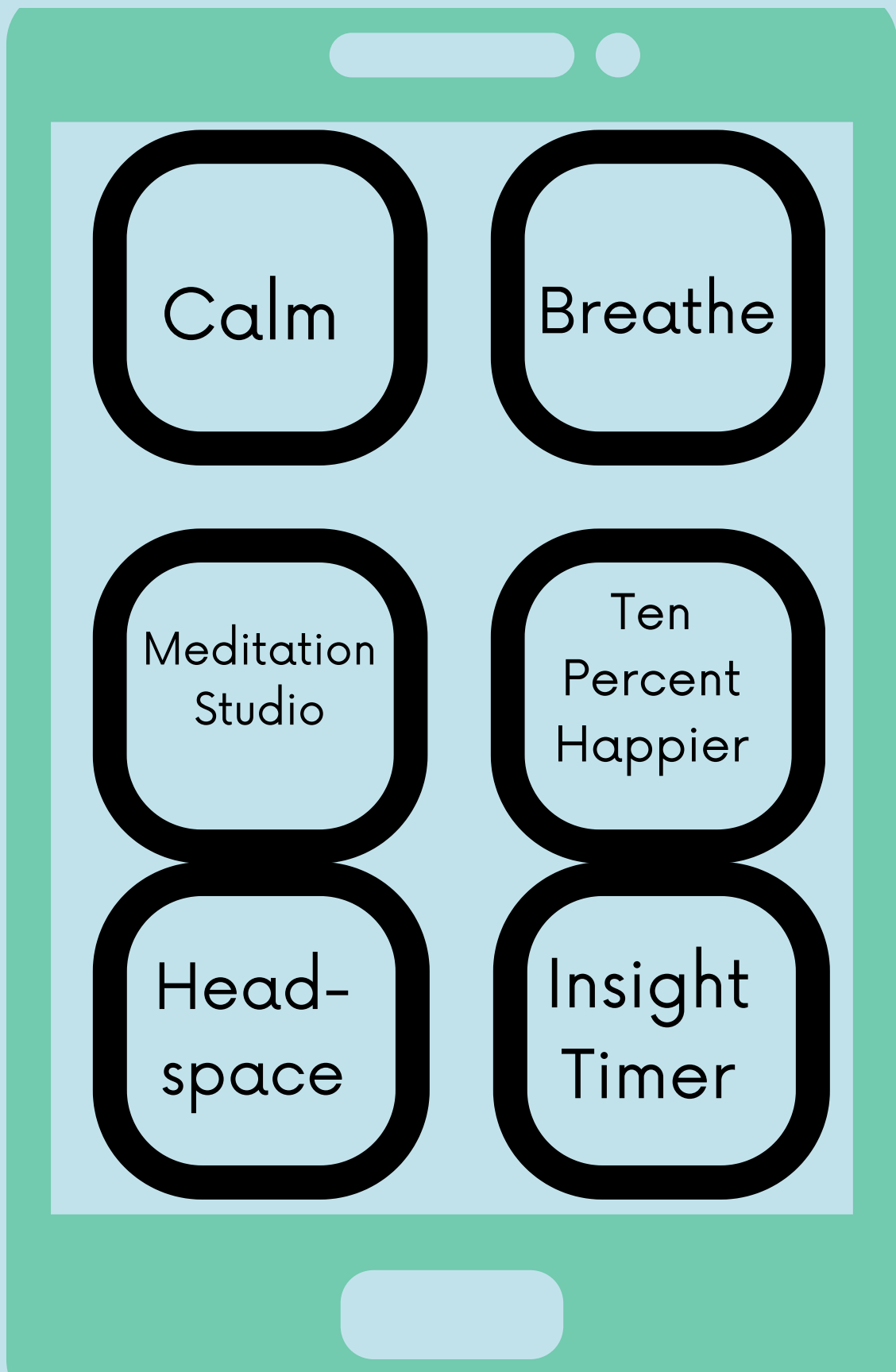
Tara Brach offers guided meditations, talks and more on her website and podcast.

Headspace offers meditation how-to videos and brief meditations on its YouTube channel.

There are many other free offerings available online that you can find by searching Google, YouTube or your podcast provider of choice.



# Lots of Good Apps



# About the Author



Claire E. Parsons is a Member at Adams, Stepler, Woltermann & Dusing, PLLC in Covington, Kentucky, where she focuses her practice in the areas of local government law, school law, and special education. In addition to managing a successful law practice and a family with two growing girls, Claire is a leader within her community and the legal profession. She has held leadership roles on public and

nonprofit boards, as well as state and national legal organizations, including MothersEsquire, Kentucky Defense Counsel, Inc., and the Kentucky School Boards Association. Claire is also a frequent speaker and author on a wide range of topics, including mindfulness.

In 2013, Claire began a mindfulness practice which drastically changed her life and law practice for the better. In the past seven years, she has attended several retreats and classes, and studied mindfulness practice in-depth. Claire's work as a lawyer, writer, and community leader have been honored several times, including this year when she received Ms. JD's "Sharing Her Passion" award for inspiring and mentoring young women lawyers.

# That's Not All, Folks!

I write frequently on **LinkedIn** about life as a lawyer and working mom, mindfulness, and more. I invite you to connect with or follow me

**@Claire E. Parsons** or  
follow my hashtag  
**#ClaireAndConvincing.**