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# Deal with Life's CHALLENGES

Looking for a way to strengthen your resilience, manage stress, boost mental clarity and stay grounded in the present moment? Sophrology could be the perfect practice says **Claire Chamberlain** – for both you and your children

**M**INDFULNESS IS NOW A household term, but you may not be familiar with its more dynamic relative. Sophrology is not a new practice, having been developed by Professor Alfonso Caycedo back in the 1960s, but while it has only recently become more prevalent in the UK, its roots have spread fairly widely in Europe. In France and Spain, in particular, it has grown steadily in popularity, and the therapeutic practice of sophrology is now commonly offered to help improve mental clarity, as well as to manage stress and anxiety, and to help restore life balance. But what exactly is it?

## Origins of practice

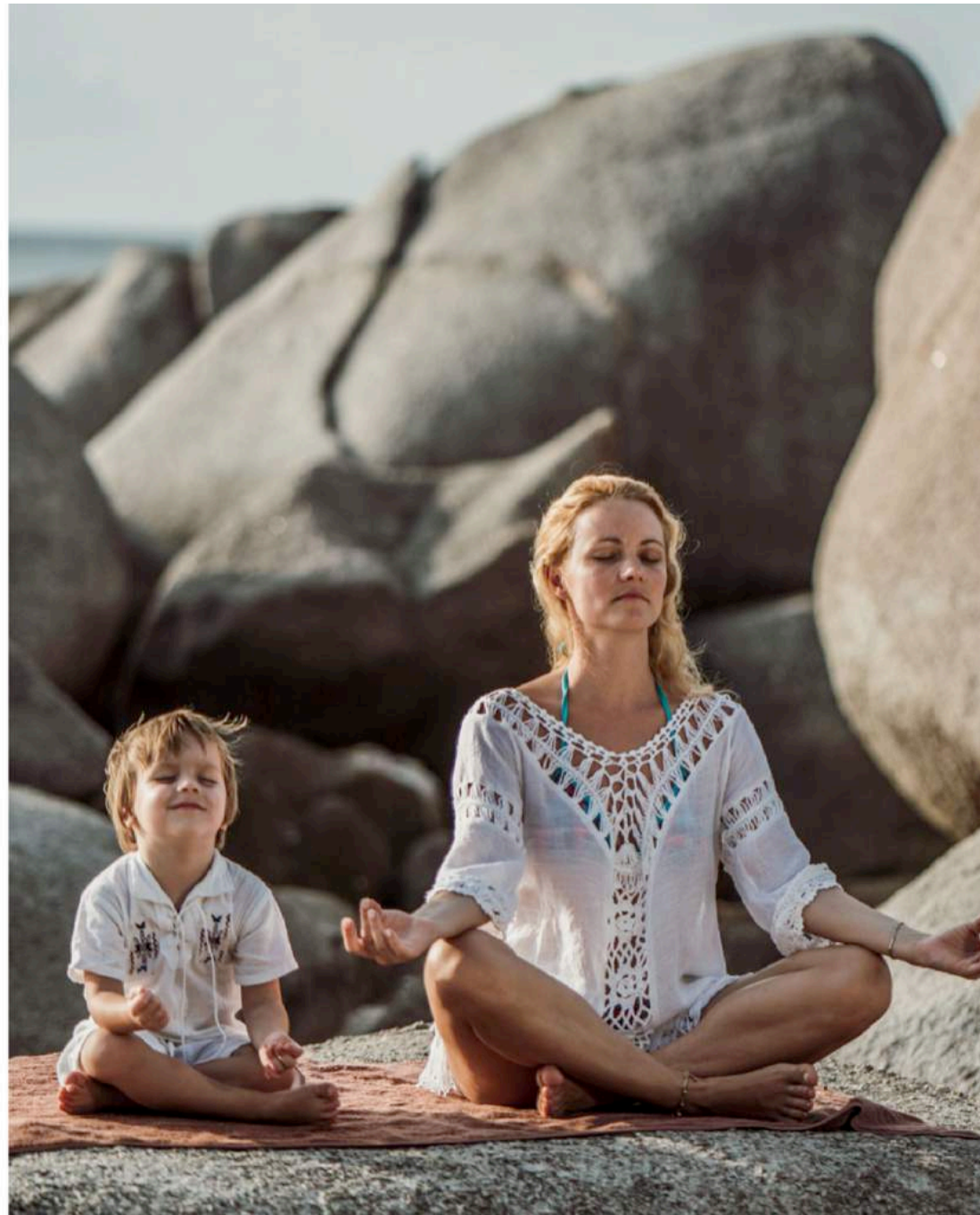
A doctor and surgeon specialising in psychiatry and neurology, Professor Caycedo became fascinated by the idea of developing gentle and therapeutic ways of improving people's daily lives. After travelling through Asia and immersing himself in Eastern practices such as yoga, Japanese Zen and Tibetan Buddhist meditation, he came to create sophrology – a series of easy-to-perform physical and mental exercises that can help lead to a calm, alert mind within a relaxed body. "Sophrology is a self-development and

stress management method," explains Dominique Antiglian at BeSopbro and author of best selling book on the topic. "It's a form of 'dynamic relaxation' that blends Eastern philosophies with Western science into a unique and simple practice, comprising breath work, relaxation, gentle body movement and visualisation techniques. As you quieten the mind and ground in the body, the technique also allows you to build up your resilience and positively deal with life's challenges. Sophrology allows you not only to feel more relaxed, present, open and focused every day, but it's also a great tool to helping you get into a certain mindset for important life events, such as interviews, and to enhance your performance."

## Staying grounded

If you've ever found it challenging to keep your mind grounded in the present moment during a mindfulness practice, sophrology could offer a short and simple way to reap the benefits of staying within the 'now', alongside other perks.

"Mindfulness and meditative practices are key to maintaining a balanced state of body and mind," says Dominique. "But some people still struggle with these practices, for example, some are



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simply unable to calm their minds during meditation, while others find yoga physically too demanding.

"The difference with sophrology is that it uniquely combines techniques that engage both the mind and body, so it's ideal for those who are unable to sit still for long periods of time, and who want to incorporate body awareness into the practice. There is more emphasis on the discovery of the body to access a positive and relaxed state, notably through physical movement and breathing exercises – it's this combination that leads to a greater sense of focus, calm and wellbeing. Also, you don't have to commit for long periods of time, but you'll experience immediate effects, thanks to the unique combination of mind-body work. As a result, it's a great technique for tackling issues such as confidence building, improving sleep, or managing anxiety or stress."

## For teenagers

Dominique herself began practicing sophrology at the age of 15, after a long period of suffering with exhaustion, low energy and dizziness, brought on by academic pressure.

"During the formative years and depending on the environment, children aren't necessarily given the tools or knowledge to help them understand and deal positively with their emotions," she says. "I highly recommend parents encourage their teenage children to try it. Teenagers face so many challenges, from anxiety to lack of sleep, exam stress to maintaining positive friendships, academic performance to pressure on choosing a career path, so having a self-development >



that. "Parents can use it to prepare for their journey into parenthood, too, using it as a tool for calm and support during pregnancy and into the early months of parenthood, when fears and challenges can be overwhelming," says Dominique. "Learning to recognise these feelings and knowing how we can positively manage them is invaluable."

*Claire is a freelance journalist and mother who lives in Kent. Passionate about the outdoors, she encourages her children to enjoy more wild time and less screen time.*

### MORE INSPIRATION

**DISCOVER** Visit Dominique's website, [be-sophro.com](http://be-sophro.com)

**READ** The Life-Changing Power of Sophrology (*Yellow Kite*, £14.99), which guides you through your own sophrology practice, alongside an accompanying online or downloadable audio guide.

**LEARN** Dominique's online sophrology course, Relax, Reset & Overcome Stress, is also available now at [be-sophro.com](http://be-sophro.com), priced £95.

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> tool like this can really give them a greater awareness of their capabilities and how to connect with their resilience when life becomes more challenging."

### For parents

Now a mother herself, Dominique believes sophrology can help parents develop greater resilience, a sense of calm and increased self-awareness, all vital in order to cope with the very unique demands of raising children. "The visualisation techniques are incredibly powerful in helping parents to understand their own self-development."

Dominique incorporates it into her daily life and finds the practice has made her a calmer parent. "I practice every day, sometimes for just a few minutes, sometimes for almost an hour, depending on the time I have and the challenges I'm facing. It helped me a great deal with the birth of my son, which took an unexpected turn, and helped me to accept and adapt myself to the challenges at the time. On a daily basis, even if I have moments where I am challenged by my three year old, I would say it makes me a calmer parent, with greater confidence."

But in fact, your journey with sophrology as a parent could start even earlier than

## Your introduction to sophrology

If you'd like to start your own practice, try these two short, simple and effective exercises from Dominique, to help get you started

### The Pump

"This exercise offers immediate tension relief," says Dominique.

**1** Standing tall, let your arms fall straight alongside your body and clench your fists.

**2** Now exhale through your mouth, then inhale through your nose and hold the breath.

**3** As you hold the breath, 'pump' both of your shoulders up and down until you need to exhale again.

**4** As you exhale vigorously, relax your arms and hands completely, allowing all tension and tightness to drain simultaneously through the arms and hands.

**5** Repeat until you notice you feel calm and rebalanced once more.

### The Tratak

"This is great to help you reset and re-focus your mind, when there is a lot of internal 'clutter'," explains Dominique. "It engages your brain and body, and increases your ability to focus on a single task. Research shows that a simple 'tracking the object' exercise like this causes

increased interaction between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, to sharpen focus and improve creativity. Repeat three times or until you feel focused and fully engaged."

**1** Hold your arm straight in front of you and focus your gaze on your thumbnail.

**2** Inhale through your nose and hold your breath, while very slowly drawing your thumb towards the space between your eyebrows – your eyes will naturally cross.

**3** Next, close your eyes and exhale through the mouth.

**4** Repeat three times, or as desired.