

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is borrowed from the traditional meditation practice but not in the sense that we may expect. This technique is useful to help in learning to tolerate strong feelings. The idea is not to control thoughts or feelings, but accept that they are part of experience.

When practicing mindfulness, you do not sit in the lotus position, chanting on top of a mountain etc but rather mindfulness is a skill you can practice in everyday life. It is the act of **participating** in you life, of being **awake** and **present**. It is also the practice of becoming more **intentional** in your life.

Thus it combines **attention and intention**. Core mindfulness essentially are skills to take hold of your mind – your full attention on one thing in the present moment

Mindfulness is a paradox – it is both easy and difficult. It is easy in the sense that you have all the necessary equipment to practice mindfulness with you at all times and it is difficult because much of our world and habits militate against it.

The nature of mindfulness is:

- becoming more aware
- becoming more intentional
- becoming more participatory in you own life and experiences
- becoming more present and alive in each moment you live.

Mindfulness is about letting go of preconceived notions about self, others and reality itself and thus in practice you can become increasingly perceptive of things as they are, and more aware of your biases without needing to act in every instance.

Benefits of Mindfulness: As mentioned above – assist in tolerating strong feelings thus emotional and psychological benefits flow on from this. Additionally research has shown it has health benefits – it reduces stress. Stress can influence blood pressure, heart rhythms, and pulse rate which can then lead onto susceptibility to illness.

The goal of mindfulness skills is to develop a lifestyle of participation with awareness.

Mindfulness meditation involves learning a number of skills. These are the **WHAT** and **HOW** skills.

The WHAT skills are:

- Observe (just notice) – begin by just noticing your environment, thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences without reacting to them, without judging them.
- Describe (put words on) – using words to describe your emotions. Stay descriptive, and keep it very simple.

- Participate (act intuitively from wise mind) - When practiced over and over again, mindfulness helps to increase the degree to which you participate in your life and experiences.

The HOW skills are have to do with *how* one observes, describes and participates

- Non-judgmentally - (neither good nor bad) – the goal is to take a non-judgmental stance when observing, describing and participating. See but don't evaluate – focus on the facts – the “what”, not the “good or bad”, “terrible or wonderful”. Judging is any labeling or evaluating of something as good or bad, worthwhile or not. Judging is sometimes a shorthand way of comparing things to a standard
- One-mindfully (in the moment) – the process of doing one thing at a time with awareness; to have your mind completely on what you are doing at the moment, both physical and mental activities. It is acting with undivided attention
- Effectively (focus on what works) – this skill is to focus on being effective – to focus on doing what works rather than “right or wrong” or “fair vs unfair”.

Mindfulness exercises:

Making use of the senses:

What I can see
 What I can hear
 What I can feel externally
 What I feel internally
 What I smell

Mindfulness while walking:

While walking, focus on what you observe as you go, using your senses. Name to yourself what you observe.

If your attention wanders, name the thought (“I notice that I had a thought about the meeting”) and bringing your attention back to your immediate surroundings.

Counting breaths:

Bringing your eyes down to look at one point on the floor, beginning to become aware of your breath and begin counting your breaths beginning at one and going up to ten. If you lose count, start back at one. If you notice intrusive thoughts, acknowledge them and move them aside to resume counting.