

Exploring Mindfulness Handout

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a way of **being** in the world.

- Being mindful means responding, not reacting, to the ever present flow of events and experiences in your life with patience, openness, and compassion.”
- “Learning how to live mindfully isn’t about getting some technique right, achieving a blissful state, or knowing the ultimate answers; it’s about learning to let go of your fear and other patterns of habitual thought so you can stay present amidst your life as it unfolds.”

Roberts, T. (2009). The mindfulness workbook: A beginner’s guide to overcoming fear & embracing compassion. New Harbinger: Oakland, CA.

Mindfulness Can Help You:

- Relieve stress, anxiety, panic, or chronic pain
- Manage out-of-control emotions, and many health conditions
- Respond to events in your life, and to yourself, with patience, openness, and compassion
- Strengthen and deepen your connections and relationships

Mindfulness Includes:

- Focusing thoughts only on the present time instead of the past or future
- Listening to your body and being kind to yourself
- Becoming more aware of your surroundings
- Allowing you to enjoy experiences more intensely
- Finding relaxation, acceptance, fulfillment, and calmness

Lacking Mindfulness Can Include:

- Reactions that are based on fear
- Feeling disconnected from your experiences and from others
- Feeling unable to focus - You can refocus yourself by saying, “Just this” if your thoughts start wandering or racing.
- Feeling like “life is passing you by” with thoughts in the past or future rather than the unfolding present time
- Feeling unable to enjoy yourself
- Tending to have negative thinking

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Mindful Breathing

- Slowly breathe deeply, and exhale completely.
- Pause after you exhale, and hold for 4 seconds before allowing the air to return to your lungs.
- Repeat four times, allowing your breath to breathe on its own and finding your pause between each breath.

Mindful Eating

- People tend to eat mindlessly. When “chowing down,” we think about other things and don’t really taste our food.
- We often respond to the sight of food with the impulse to devour it (whether or not we are actually hungry).
- We miss the subtle feelings of fullness if we don’t slow down to finish chewing and swallowing before we pick up the next bite – It takes 20 minutes for your body to signal that it is full.
- By eating fast, you are more likely to overeat or have discomfort.
- Try eating mindfully by eating alone or in silence, savoring the sight, smell, texture, the color and light on the food.
- Appreciate its connection to the outside world, the taste and feel of the food as you eat it slowly.
- In mindfulness retreats, meals are usually served in silence as people savor the food and consider the efforts that went into growing and preparing it.
- They often feel satisfied without eating as much food.

Siegel, R. (2010). *The mindfulness solution: Everyday practices for everyday problems*, p. 261-264. New York: Guilford Press

Mindful Experiences

- Observe the flow of your experiences without judging or being distracted by them
- Respond with openness, not just reacting to your experiences
- Show you that what is truly happening may be different than what you had been seeing and reacting to
- Give you a sense of connection to something larger

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- Decrease stress and fear in your life (but not by shielding you or keeping you in your comfort zone)

“Letting the Mud Settle”

- Think of a concern you now have, like a relationship or financial struggle, a medical problem or a situation that makes you feel depressed or fearful.
- Imagine you are watching this concern without judgment, reaction, or distraction.
- Think of it as a color, shape, or object that you hold in your hand.
- Visualize standing in front of a clear bowl with water or other liquid in it.
- Drop in the object that concerns you and stir for two minutes.

Think about putting the spoon down and ask yourself if anything changed.

When you stirred, how did it make you feel?

When you stopped stirring, what happened to your concern? How did you feel?

- Even if the water was still muddy and your concern didn't dissolve, it is OK.
- This doesn't predict a certain outcome in the real world, but it can help you feel better.
- The lesson of “letting the mud settle” is that when you stop letting fear “stir things up” in your life, you'll begin to feel a “shift” and find new awareness.
- Responses based on fear keep you “stirred up” as you try to reject and control your experiences.
- When you stop “stirring things up” and then “let the mud settle”, you may see mindful solutions and be open to learn things you had been ignoring.

Watching Thoughts and Feelings

- Instead of trying to escape your experiences, you can greet them with curiosity and interest.

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- Think of being in a dark, stuffy attic crowded and cluttered with all sorts of things saved from the past.
- You would feel better by going into the attic and starting to clean out the clutter. You can see things more clearly.
- Getting rid of the clutter also helps you respond to things in the present without reacting to thoughts and feelings from the past.

Living in the Moment Means Letting Go of the Past

- If we don't let go of painful experiences, difficult times, or things we believe were wrong, we find ourselves in a present and future that includes the same painful feelings.
- Even though we can't change the past, we can come to terms with it, know that it's over, and move on.
- Living mindfully and being more positive when thinking about the present opens up the possibility of making every moment count and having a better future.

Mindfulness begins with relaxation:

- Drop your shoulders, loosen your jaw and your other muscles.
- Take three slow, deep breaths, breathing in through your nose and releasing the air through your mouth gently and easily.
- Soften your gaze and awaken your senses.
- Savor the moment to recharge, renew, and think clearly.

“Watching, Naming, and Letting Go”

- Sit comfortably, as you watch the parade of your thoughts, emotions, and sensations without judging or reacting to them for 5 minutes.
- Simply greet whatever passes through your awareness gently with a “hello.”
- Give it a name, like “conflict” or “impatience” and let it keep passing by.
- By using nouns to name your experiences, you can say what it is without judgment.
- It is OK if certain events keep repeating. – Those may be things that will need deeper attention later.

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Were you able to let go of the thoughts more easily? Did you feel a “shift” in your awareness?

- Responding mindfully is not instant, but is a process that takes time and helps you create “openness” in your life.
- **“The place in which you find yourself is not as important as where you place your awareness while you are there”.**

Mindful Presence

- Mindful relationships can be **simply profound and profoundly simple**:
 - Follow the path of simply **being**, and practice **careful presence**.
 - Instead of reacting with fear, respond with patience.
 - Instead of restriction, respond with openness.
 - Instead of mistrusting, respond with compassion.
 - Instead of rejection, respond with acceptance.

Loving Kindness Metta

Loving attention to your heart:

Then to a loved one
Then to acquaintance/friend
Someone in difficulty
Stranger
Someone you have difficulty with
All living beings
The universe
Back to yourself

Metta is a Buddhist term - the strong wish for happiness, welfare, and freedom of all living beings. The wish for your own happiness and welfare is very important, as it is the basis for the positive, caring actions you do for the world.

Discussion

How can mindfulness affect you and your ability to cope?

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What do you want to achieve by being more mindful?

How and when will you start using mindfulness?

Download free mindfulness meditations by R. Siegel online at www.mindfulness-solution.com. Choose some exercises to try, such as loving kindness, breath awareness meditations, or thought labeling

Conclusion

- Seeing a need for mindfulness is the first step toward learning and practicing it.
- Start to focus on changing yourself and your attitudes by learning to be mindful.
- Realize that you can't change other people - There are some things we just have to let go.
- By using mindfulness, you can cope better and have a healthier recovery.

References

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