

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is the act of being present and being intentional with our attention. When we are mindful we notice what is happening in and around us, so that we can learn to accept and manage our experience, instead of allowing our thoughts or emotions to run the show.

Spending a lot of time 'in your head' causes stress. There are always new things to worry about, conversations to rehearse, and activities to plan.

Scientists have found that when you live in the moment — that is, get 'out of your head' and focus on your surroundings instead of being wrapped up in your thoughts — you will usually feel happier and feel less stress. With enough practice, you will also learn to better manage your thoughts and feelings, so that you are in control of them rather than them being in control of you! Here are some strategies to help you practice being mindful.

Mindfulness skills

Practicing these mindfulness skills can help us to remain in the moment and to more effectively notice, acknowledge, accept, and tolerate our emotions and the situations around us.

Do one thing at a time

When you are eating, eat.

When you are walking, walk.

When you are dancing, dance

When you are worrying, worry

During each of these practices, notice the desire to be somewhere else, to go somewhere else in your mind, to do something else, to multitask—and then come back to doing one thing at a time.

Let go of distractions. If you notice that other actions, thoughts, or feelings are distracting you, notice them and return to what you are doing. Focus your mind. If you find you are doing two things at once, pause, and return to doing one thing at a time.

Some helpful skills for practicing doing one thing at a time:

Observe:

- Notice your body sensations (use the five senses mindfulness exercise for guidance.)
- Observe both inside and outside of yourself: what sensations do you notice in your body? What are you feeling? Do you notice an urges to do a certain thing? What is going on around you? Try to use your five senses.

Describe

- Put words to an experience
- Work to focus on objective facts and let go of interpretations and judgments. Describe "who, what, when, and where."
- Put words to your thoughts and interpretations and label them as thoughts and interpretations. For example, note to yourself "My brain is telling me that I am not very good at mindfulness" or "I'm having the thought that this is too hard for me." Try to notice whether your thoughts are helpful or harmful.

Fully participate in what you're doing

Join in without holding back. Notice thoughts/feelings that may be distracting from the situation and throw yourself completely into the experience

Practice being non-judgmental

Notice yourself, others, and the experience itself and try not to evaluate as good or bad; just acknowledge the facts

If you find yourself judging (yourself, other or the experience), notice and acknowledge your judgment and re-focus on the observing the facts of the current experience

Practice being kind and compassionate toward yourself

If you find yourself judging yourself harshly or unkindly, turn your mind towards self-acceptance and self-kindness

You can use the following resources to practice self-kindness:

- Read script from <http://www.gozen.com/love/>
- Play guided meditation from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NC2aHvob0eo>

Using mindfulness with other skills

Mindfulness is a key part of all other skills learned in CBT.

Relaxation & Distress Tolerance: Mindfulness is an important part of relaxation and distress tolerance. Mindfulness allows us to notice, acknowledge and accept strong feelings and experiences more effectively, and can help us focus our attention during relaxation and distress tolerance exercises.

Cognitive Coping: to begin challenging anxious and/or depressive thoughts, we need to use mindfulness skills to notice (observe) and put words to (describe) our anxious/depressive thinking. We can't change our thoughts if we don't notice when they're happening!

Behavioral Activation: We can use mindfulness to be more engaged with pleasant and active events and to tolerate uncomfortable experiences more effectively.

Exposure: To effectively retrain our brain about what is dangerous, we have to be really present during exposures and focused on the anxiety. If we aren't mindful (i.e. if we distract ourselves, let our minds wander, etc.) exposures are not as effective.