

What is Mindfulness?

Adapted from A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Handbook, Stahl and Goldstein, 2010 and

<https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.

Mindfulness is a quality that every human being already possesses, it's not something you have to conjure up, you just have to learn how to access it. It is cultivating an awareness of the mind and body and living in the here and now. Mindfulness is being with yourself and observing, without judgement, your breath, thoughts, emotions, body sensations.

Non-judgment is an important concept. Many of us have frequent critical, judgmental thoughts about ourselves and others throughout the day. In mindfulness the idea is to become aware of one's breath, thoughts, emotions and body sensations without judging them. This may be a change for you. Be kind to yourself as you practice mindfulness, being non-judgmental may not happen quickly but part of the process is to notice and accept your thoughts and emotions.

Mindfulness can be done formally or informally. Formally is when you set aside a time each day to intentionally be aware of your breath, your thoughts, your emotions and your body sensations. Informal mindfulness can happen in the flow of your day when you bring mindfulness to everyday activities such as work, eating, parenting, talking with other people etc. At some point in your mindfulness practice you might use a mindful check-in when you are experiencing stress, racing thoughts or anxiety to help you understand what might be causing these things.

As you begin a mindfulness practice think about how you plan or schedule things. Can you keep mental track of when you plan to do your formal practice? Or do you need a printed calendar or a reminder on your phone or your computer? There is a weekly schedule template at the end of this handout if it would help to have something ready to use.

Formal practice – Mindful Check-in

The mindful check-in is a 3-minute mindfulness practice that is a good place to begin your practice.

Find a quiet relaxing environment (as best you can!) with as few distractions as possible. You can do this sitting up or lying down but be aware that it may be easy to fall asleep if you are lying down. Many people keep their eyes closed but some prefer to keep them partly open.

Once you have a place and a posture, begin slow breaths. Notice your breath on the inhaled, going into your body. Then notice the exhaled as the air leaves your lungs. Take a few slow breaths. Next notice your body, are parts of your body tense, are parts relaxed, are parts sore? Thoughts may come into your mind. This is normal. Notice the thoughts and then let them go.

Notice if there is judgement that goes along with any of the thoughts. Judgement is common for many people, note it and let it go by clearing your mind. One person I know visualizes her thought as words going right to left in front of her eyes. Then the words “scroll off” your vision. She says this helps her let go of thoughts.

Do this for 3 minutes. At the end notice your thoughts, emotions and body sensations. Some people like keeping a journal about their practice. I also include a journal template at the end of this handout.

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