

A Practical Guide to Mindfulness.

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Summary.

- Mindfulness involves bringing our awareness to whatever is happening in the present moment.
 - What is happening outside of us.
 - What is happening within us – bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts.
- We will all have difficult thoughts and emotions that are easy to get caught up in – this is part of being human.
- Mindfulness involves bringing kind curiosity to these experiences and not judging them – “This is what is happening right now.”
- Refraining from judging our experiences can help us keep from shifting into threat, so that we can be at our best when working with difficult situations.
- Mindfulness can help keep us from getting caught up in challenging thoughts and emotions, so that we can instead consider what would be most helpful in working with the situations (and with our own feelings and thoughts about it).

Actionable tips.

How to bring mindfulness into any moment:

- Do a quick mindful check-in:
 - Pause to notice what is happening in the outside world.
 - Pause to notice your bodily experience (tension, relaxation, etc.).
 - Pause to notice your emotions. What are you feeling right now?
 - Pause to notice your thoughts. What words and images are moving through your mind right now?
- Pause to notice what emotions are driving the show: feelings of threat? Feelings of motivation and drive? Feelings of safety and calm?
- Notice how these experiences shape what you are paying attention to, feeling, and thinking about.

Practicing mindfulness in every day:

- At any moment, bring your attention to what is happening right now:
 - The feel, smell, look, and taste of food.
 - The physical sensations that come up when you're doing something.
 - Noticing how you feel or think whenever something happens.
- Develop a mindful breathing practice using online resources (just search “mindful breathing”).

Keep from getting caught up in thoughts and emotions:

- Remind yourself that thoughts and emotions are simply mental events.
- See if it's possible to notice thoughts and emotions without either accepting them as true or judging them.
- If you notice threat-based tension, try to relax that part of the body.
- If you notice threat-based arousal (racing heart, etc.), slow down the breath to 4-5 seconds per in-breath and out-breath for 1-5 minutes.

If you notice you're caught up in tricky thoughts or emotions:

- Remind yourself that you have a tricky human brain and that this happens to all of us sometimes.
- See if it's possible to approach this experience with kind curiosity, without judging it or blaming yourself or anyone else: “Wow, I'm really stuck in this feeling.”
- Ask yourself, “Given what I know about me, my history, and this situation, does it make sense that I would struggle with this situation?” (hint: the answer is “yes”).
- Ask yourself, “Given that this is what I'm experiencing, what might be helpful right now?”
- Consider what has been helpful in the past. Connecting with friends? Asking for help? Giving yourself a bit of space to think about the situation?
- Ask yourself, “If I was the best version of me – kind, wise, confident, and strong – what would I understand about this situation? What would I do?”
- Remind yourself that when we feel threatened, we're focused on the threat and unable to think flexibly and creatively. What would help you feel safe to tackle the situation?

Bringing mindfulness to our interactions with others:

- Try to notice what their body language, facial expression, and tone of voice tells you about what their experience might be. What might they be feeling and thinking?
- Try to notice if they are feeling threatened, excited and driven, or safe.

- Remember that if they're in threat mode, nothing is getting through – and that isn't their fault (because they have a tricky human brain, too).
- Consider how you might help them feel safe in the situation before pushing for a solution.

Resources.

- Williams, M., Penman, D. (2012). Mindfulness: An Eight-Week Plan for Finding Peace in a Frantic World. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale.

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