

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

To be mindful involves living from moment to moment. By living in the present, you will naturally have an increased awareness of your thoughts and feelings in that moment and will notice how your mind is constantly 'talking'.

HOW CAN BECOMING MORE MINDFUL HELP?

Having this awareness allows for an acceptance of these thoughts and feelings. Someone who is not mindful will give their thoughts excessive importance. For example, people often think thoughts such as "that person must not like me" or "I didn't make a good impression there" or "everything is getting on top of me". However, a mindful person will realise that these thoughts are just thoughts and will let them go rather than automatically assume they are truths.

Negative feelings are the result of negative thoughts. Therefore, by spending a lot of time thinking about past negative experiences or future concerns, you may begin to feel angry, sad, guilty, anxious or regretful. Many people think the past runs their lives. However, the only part of the past that exists today is nothing more than the thoughts that you have about it. They are simply memories now. This doesn't suggest you should pretend your past didn't occur, but you should accept the thoughts about your past as simple, harmless memories passing through your mind rather than as a current reality that must be considered. Understanding our thoughts in this way allows us to become less preoccupied with, and give less meaning to them.

MINDFULNESS AND HAPPINESS

Happiness is simple - regardless of what happened last year, last week or last night and regardless of what may happen next week or next year, happiness lies in the present. This is an extremely simple principle, but is not one naturally adopted by humans. It will take some practice, but once you realise thoughts do not reflect reality and your present mood is being affected by thoughts of things outwith the moment, you will be a more peaceful person.

While we must sometimes think about our past or speculate about the future, it is best to try to live in the moment as often as possible. For example, while walking you can be mindful of the sensation upon the soles of your feet, the beauty of the landscape, or the sound of the wind in the trees. You can also be mindful of your thoughts at that moment. When we understand that the experience we are having is generated by our thoughts, we can change negative perceptions such as "this is boring - this is a waste of time - I wish I was already

home so I can get started on something" to "the sun is beating down - the trees are softly moving in the wind - the architecture is beautiful". In this example, you can see something as neutral as walking does not have to be judged negatively as 'boring' or 'time-wasting' because it is an objective activity which you can subjectively interpret in any way.

HOW TO APPLY MINDFULNESS

To apply mindfulness, you should try to be more aware of your thoughts and bring them back to the present moment. Concentrate on your external surroundings rather than on your inner thoughts. Once you begin to become more mindful, you will likely recognise hundreds of fleeting thoughts relating to the past and future. By consciously correcting your attention to focus on the present over a period of time, it will begin to become automatic and natural. You should learn to let go of these thoughts and concentrate on the here and now, instead of becoming immersed in thoughts that may result in a bad mood.

It is likely when you feel annoyed, frustrated, or upset that your mind has wandered from the present. The next time you feel this way, ask yourself what you have been thinking about. Understand it is these thoughts that have influenced your mood, accept them for what they are (simply units of our conscious mind), and bring yourself back to the present. For example:

Stop reading for a moment and think about where you are now. You are sitting comfortably reading something of your own choosing. Your life in this moment is not concerned with past harms or with future worries. You are simply sitting reading. Then think about all you still have to do this week. As you think about these tasks, you will notice your peace of mind slipping. The only thing that has changed to make this happen is your thoughts because the present moment is not unpleasant and contains no harms.

Hopefully this demonstrates how powerful thinking can be and how quickly it can change your mood. It is important to remember you cannot change or stop these thoughts, but by being aware of them, you can stop them from growing and go back to your naturally contented state in the present moment.

It is difficult to try to dismiss thoughts and stay in the present moment when something has happened that

pushes out rationality and perspective. This happens to everyone. However, while in a low mood, you should recognise that your thoughts will likely be negative and unhelpful and know that it will pass and things will be easier to deal with once this mood has gone. As difficult as it is to relax in these situations, you should do your best to take your mind off the situation, realising any thoughts will probably be unhelpful and pull you away from the present.

MORE INFORMATION

1. Our First Psychology centres can help you. To find out more or to arrange an initial session contact us at your local centre:

ABERDEEN: info@aberdeenpsychology.co.uk,
tel: 01224-452848, www.aberdeenpsychology.co.uk

BORDERS: info@borderspsychology.co.uk,
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EDINBURGH: info@edinburghtherapy.co.uk,
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GLASGOW: info@glasgowpsychology.co.uk,
tel: 0141-404-5411, www.glasgowpsychology.co.uk

2. Alternatively you may wish to speak to your GP who should be able to refer you to someone suitable.

3. See our links on our websites for details of organisations who may be able to provide assistance or information.