

MINDFULNESS

Definitions of Mindfulness

The official ACT definition of mindfulness is: “The defused, accepting, open contact with the present moment and the private events it contains, as a conscious human being, experientially distinct from the content being noticed.”

Here are some alternative definitions:

“Bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis.”
(Marlatt & Kristeller)

“Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn).

“The nonjudgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise.” (Baer)

“Awareness of present experience with acceptance.” (Germer, Segal, Fulton)

“Consciously bringing awareness to your here-and-now experience, with openness, interest and receptiveness.” (Harris)

My own definition: “The practice of attending to what is presently observable with curiosity and compassion.”

The Basic Mindfulness 'Formula'

Start with focusing on an 'anchor' such as the breath or body. Then shift focus to another aspect of experience (e.g., sounds or thoughts). Then expand focus to become simultaneously aware of multiple aspects of experience (e.g., sounds, thoughts, sensations, breathing, and body posture).

1. Find a comfortable position, feet on the floor, back straight, shoulders loose,
2. Close your eyes, or fix them on a non-distracting spot
3. Make it your intention for the next few minutes to purely and simply be present, here and now – and to notice what is happening, with an attitude of openness and curiosity.
4. Bring your awareness to X
5. Simply notice X without judging it, analyzing it, fighting it or trying to change it. Observe X with curiosity. Learn as much about X as you can.
6. As you maintain your attention on X, thoughts will come into your awareness. Allow them to come & go freely, as they please. Don't try & hold on to them or push them away. Simply acknowledge their presence, let them be, and bring your attention back to X.
7. From time to time, urges, feelings and sensations will probably arise. When they do, simply acknowledge them, and let them be. Make room for them. Let them stay, or come & go freely, as they please. Don't try & hold on to them or push them away.
8. From time to time your attention will "wander off." As soon as you realise this has happened, gently acknowledge it, briefly note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to X.
9. There is no need to be disappointed or frustrated. Our attention naturally wanders. Each time you notice your attention has wandered, simply note what distracted you, and gently bring your attention back to X.
10. Remember, you are learning a valuable skill so be gentle with yourself. If your attention wanders 1000 times, your aim is simply to bring it back 1000 times.
11. Now bring your attention to Y (Repeat previous instructions as desired.)
12. Now bring your attention to Z
13. Now notice X and Y and Z, all at the same time.
14. Now notice where you are, what you're doing, and everything you're aware of; then open your eyes and connect with the room around you, and hold onto that sense of being present, here and now.

Mindfulness of Eating a Grape

Throughout this exercise, all sorts of thoughts and feelings will arise. Let them come and go, and keep your attention on the exercise. If you realize that your attention has wandered, briefly note what distracted you, then bring your attention back to the grape.

Take hold of the grape.

First look at it as if you're a curious scientist who has never seen such a thing before. Notice the shape, the color, the different shades of color, the parts where light bounces off the surface, the contours, the pit where the stalk was attached.

Notice the weight of it in your hand and the feel of the skin against your fingers: its texture and temperature.

Raise it to your nose and smell it. Notice the aroma.

Raise it to your mouth and pause for a moment before biting into it. Bring your attention to what is happening inside your mouth: notice the salivation around your tongue and the urge to bite into it.

Now slowly bite it in half, noticing your teeth breaking through the skin and sinking into the flesh and the sound that makes, and the sensation of sweetness on your tongue.

Notice your teeth meeting, and the feel of the grape falling onto your tongue, and the urge to chew it and swallow it.

Chew it slowly, noticing the taste and texture. Notice the movement of your jaws, the sound that chewing makes, the sensation of the flesh breaking down. Notice how your tongue shapes the food.

Notice your urge to swallow – and as you do swallow, notice the movement in your throat, and the sound it makes.

And after you've swallowed, pause and notice the way the taste gradually disappears from your tongue. Notice your growing urge to eat the remaining half.

Now eat the rest of the grape in the same way.

Mindfulness of the Breath

1. Bring your attention to your breathing
2. Follow the air as it comes in through your nostrils and goes down to the bottom of your lungs. Then follow it as it goes back out again.
3. Follow the air, as if you're riding the waves of your breathing
4. Notice the air moving in and out of your nostrils ... how it's slightly warmer as it comes out, and cooler as it goes in
5. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your rib cage
6. Notice the gentle rise & fall of your abdomen (belly)
7. Fix your attention on one of these areas, whichever you prefer: on the breath moving in and out of the nostrils, on the rising & falling of the ribcage, or the rising & falling of the abdomen (belly)
8. Keep your attention on this spot, noticing the movement - in and out – of the breath
9. Whatever feelings, urges or sensations arise, whether pleasant or unpleasant, gently acknowledge them - as if nodding your head at people passing by you on the street. Gently acknowledge their presence, and let them be. Allow them to come & go as they please, and keep your attention on the breath.
10. Whatever thoughts, images, or memories arise, whether comfortable or uncomfortable, simply acknowledge them and allow them to be. Let them come & go as they please, and keep your attention on the breath.
11. From time to time, your attention will become distracted by thoughts or feelings. Each time this happens, notice what distracted you, then bring your attention back to the breath. No matter how often your attention "wanders off" - whether a hundred times, or a thousand - your aim is simply to note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the breath.
12. There is no need to be frustrated or impatient or disappointed when you get carried off by your thoughts. It is the same for everyone. Our minds naturally distract us from what we are doing. So each time you realize your attention has wandered, gently acknowledge it, notice what distracted you, and return your attention to the breath.
13. If frustration, boredom, anxiety, impatience or other feelings arise, simply acknowledge them, and maintain your focus on the breath.
14. No matter how often your attention wanders, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and gently bring your attention back to the breath.
15. When you are ready, bring yourself back to the room and open your eyes

Practice Instructions:

Initially practice this for 5 minutes twice a day. Aim to increase the duration by 2 or 3 minutes every few days, until you can do this for 15-20 minutes at a time. Even if you only practice this for 1 minute each day, that is better than not practicing at all.

Informal Mindfulness Exercises

1) Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Pick an activity that constitutes part of your daily morning routine, such as brushing your teeth, shaving, or having a shower.

When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body as it gurgles down the hole. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair, and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell of the soap and shampoo, and the feel of them against your skin. Notice the sight of the water droplets on the walls or shower screen, the water dripping down your body and the steam rising upwards. Notice the movements of your arms as you wash or scrub or shampoo.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

2) Mindfulness of Domestic Chores

Pick an activity such as ironing clothes, washing dishes, vacuuming floors, and do it mindfully.

For example, when ironing clothes: notice the color and shape of the clothing, and the pattern made by the creases, and the new pattern as the creases disappear. Notice the hiss of the steam, the creak of the ironing board, the faint sound of the iron moving over the material. Notice the grip of your hand on the iron, and the movement of your arm and your shoulder.

If boredom or frustration arises, simply acknowledge it, and bring your attention back to the task at hand.

When thoughts arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and bring your attention back to what you are doing.

Again and again, your attention will wander. As soon as you realize this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to your current activity.

3) Take Ten Breaths

1. Throughout the day, pause for a moment and take ten slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible, until the lungs are completely empty, and breathing in using your diaphragm.
2. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying and your ribcage falling as you breathe out. Notice the rising and falling of your abdomen.
3. Notice what thoughts are passing through your mind. Notice what feelings are passing through your body.
4. Observe those thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad, and without trying to change them, avoid them, or hold onto them. Simply observe them.
5. Notice what it's like to observe those thoughts and feelings with an attitude of acceptance.

4) Notice Five Things

This is a simple exercise to center yourself, and connect with your environment. Practice it throughout the day, especially any time you find yourself getting caught up in your thoughts and feelings.

1. Pause for a moment
2. Look around, and notice five things you can see.
3. Listen carefully, and notice five things you can hear.
4. Notice five things you can feel in contact with your body (e.g., your watch against your wrist, your trousers against your legs, the air upon your face, your feet upon the floor, your back against the chair etc.).