

Mindfulness PROGRAM

Being Kind

Think about learning to speak Spanish or play piano. Can you imagine? Or, if this doesn't work, think about being better gardeners, better dog owners, better... Some of us can be very hard on ourselves when we try to be better. We can have high expectations. And, it might be easy to compare ourselves to fluent Spanish speakers or the local dog whisperer. As we engage in mindfulness practice, we might notice the same high expectations. We might secretly open our eyes during a mindfulness practice in class and think that everyone is doing it so much better.

Do you remember the ABC's? Didn't they seem impossible at first? 26 letters. Wow! And, yet, all of us know the ABC's by heart. How did this happen? Well, it took a willing mind. A teacher.

Practice. Lots of kindness from our teachers, parents, and ourselves. And, then, we began recalling bits and pieces. More practice and kindness until finally we could recite the entire alphabet-all 26 letters!

Mindfulness is no different. As you practice, remember to be gentle, caring, compassionate, humane, considerate, and sympathetic toward yourself. Let me repeat. Remember to be gentle, caring, compassionate, humane, considerate and sympathetic toward yourself. Mindfulness is not easy. Watching our minds/bodies/feelings may be the most difficult job ever. I encourage you to NOT beat yourself up, particularly if you think you "are failing." This is a learning process. As playwright Samuel Becket said, "Try again, fail again, fail better." A monk once told my friend, give full effort without creating tension or harm. Author Cheryl Wilfong draws on the gardener's wisdom:

*"The first year they sleep.
The second year they creep.
The third year they leap."*

Good things take time, practice and kindness. And if it all seems dismal, remember teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn's dictum, "If you are breathing, there is more right with you than wrong."

Or, take this poem by Samuel Trumbore for a drive

You'll Get There!

*Take comfort grasshopper,
You've tasted enough
to know the meal is delicious.
Your feet are firmly on the path.*

*When will you get there, you ask?
Just a matter of time.*

*Whether one, or seven or a hundred or
a thousand lives your time will come.
And what is that in the grand scheme
of things?*

*A blink of the eye in astronomic
measurements.*

*So relax. Watch the next breath.
Live the practice in nibbles
stringing them together.
Keep calmly knowing change.
Keep asking, "What's happening...now?"*

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Considerations for Mindful Eating

The mind has two functions, thinking and awareness. When thinking is turned up, awareness is turned down. When thinking function is going full throttle, we can eat an entire meal, an entire cake, an entire carton of ice cream, and not taste more than a bite or two. When we don't taste, we can end up stuffed to the gills but feeling completely unsatisfied. This is because the mind and mouth weren't present, weren't tasting or enjoying as we ate. The stomach became full but the mind and mouth were unfulfilled and continued calling for us to eat.

If we don't feel satisfied, we'll begin to look around for something more or something different to eat. Everyone has had the experience of roaming the kitchen, opening cupboards and doors, looking vainly for something, anything to satisfy. The only thing that will cure this, a fundamental kind of hunger, is to sit down and be, even for a few minutes, wholly present.

This is the gift of mindful eating, to restore our sense of satisfaction no matter what we are or are not eating.

Try:

Pausing, asking ourselves questions like:

Am I hungry?

Where do I feel hunger?

What part of me is hungry?

What do I really crave?

What am I tasting just now?

Try:

Really being present for the smell, texture, taste, noticing fully the felt sense in the body when tasting, chewing, swallowing.

Checking in, what is happening right now...what am I feeling in this moment?

Taken from: "*Mouthfuls of Mindfulness*"

by Jen Chozen Bays, MD, [Mindful Eating: A Guide to Rediscovering a Healthy and Joyful Relationship with Food](#)

Resources

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

Wherever You Go There You Are

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

Coming To Our Senses

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself From Chronic Unhappiness

Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn

Calming Your Anxious Mind: How Mindfulness and Compassion Can Free You From Anxiety, Fear and Panic

Jeffrey Brantley, MD

Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting

Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn

Momfulness: Mothering with Mindfulness, Compassion, and Grace

Denise Roy

Leave Your Mind Behind

Matthew McKay, PhD and Catharine Sutker

Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God

James Finley, PhD

The Naked Now: Learning To See as the Mystics See

Richard Rohr

Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer

Richard Rohr

Sadhana, a Way to God: Exercises in Eastern Form

Anthony De Mello

Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality

Anthony De Mello

The Way to Love: The Last Meditations of Anthony De Mello

Anthony DeMello

God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism

Rabbi David A. Cooper

The Instruction Manual for Receiving God

Jason Shulman

Open Secrets: The Letters of Reb Yerachmiel ben Yisrael

Rami M. Shapiro

Thinking Practice

Select a particular thought, allowing this thought to be held in spaciousness and compassionate awareness.

Notice what happens with the following questions:

What is this thought?

What's going on in the body? Noticing sensations.

Am I willing to have this thought? Perhaps noticing if any resistance is present.

Am I willing to practice mindfully observing this thought and allowing it to be present?

Does this thought motivate me or make me give up?

Does this thought make me feel pleasant or unpleasant?

Does this thought help me do the things that matter or make me anxious or afraid?

What does this thought stop me from doing or being?

Do I want this thought to direct how I live my life?

Am I willing to have this thought and do what I care about anyway?

Am I willing to have this thought and be what I care about?

Can I have compassion toward myself for this thought pattern?

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Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness practice is a way of learning to relate directly to whatever is happening in one's life and can increase the ability to cope with life's difficult times that include the challenges of stress, pain and illness, as well as everyday demands. A major foundation of this practice is looking at how we perceive what is happening in our lives and how we react to it. Our reactions to whatever is happening in our lives can be a major source of stress for many of us.

Mindfulness is an effective, practical way to cultivate physical and mental relaxation that can help you cope with stressful times. The practice is to gently return the attention to the breath, the body, the sounds, and the qualities of THIS moment and the wonders of our world. We use ordinary experience such as our breath as a refuge, a safe harbor to come back to. This capacity to be present over time becomes a great friend and allows us to see our life as it is in a deeply connected way and we learn how to live with greater wisdom, compassion and ease.

Here are some practical ways to bring mindfulness into your daily life:

- Try eating somewhat slower than usual. As an experiment, you might try intentionally eating one meal a week in silence with your family just to experience the eating itself. Also, you might consider not reading or watching TV during meals. This will help you become more sensitive to how you eat and bring increased awareness to your eating with others.
- Notice how much the mind dwells in memories of the past or anticipation of the future. Is this necessary? Do you suffer for it? The past and the future are places to visit for learning and planning, but a lot of us LIVE in the past and/or the future.
- While driving, switch off the radio and experience the silence. It might seem at first as if something is missing, but you'll quickly learn that the silence gives you an opportunity to fill your awareness with other perceptions, some of which are enriching. It can leave you quieter, calmer, and more focused.
- On your way to work, when stopped at a red light, pay attention to your breathing, the sky and the trees... noticing what is around you...noticing where your mind is at...the past, the future?
- In the workplace, use your breaks to truly relax rather than simply "pausing." For instance, instead of having coffee or reading, try taking a short walk.
- Use everyday cues in your environment as reminders to "center" yourself (e.g., the telephone ringing or certain sounds emitted by your computer). Allow these cues to signal that it's time to take a moment to pause and take a few breaths and becoming aware of bodily sensations. This allows the mind to settle and regroup.
- At the end of the work day, pay attention to the walk to your car, breathing in the crisp or warm air. Listen to the sounds around you. Can you walk without feeling rushed?
- When you arrive home from work, say hello to each of your family members or to the people you live with. Look into their eyes. If possible, make the time to take 5-10 minutes to be quiet and still. If you live alone, feel what it is like to enter the quietness of your home and the feeling of entering your own environment.

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