

Taking Care of Your Mental Health
Mindfulness and Meditation – Part I
“How to Build A Happier Brain”

Our brains are naturally wired to focus on things that make us feel stressed, frightened and unhappy. For many of us we experience hardships and terrible situations that are unavoidable. It would be impossible for us to avoid these negative situations but we can “train our brain” to appreciate positive experiences by focusing on the merits of what is going right and “taking in the good” whenever we are able.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the simple practice of paying attention. It means practicing present-moment awareness and whenever we are feeling lost or confused about what to do, it helps us to return to the present moment experience. Mindfulness helps bring a certain perspective to our lives by enlarging our own particular struggles. When we are in the midst of “drowning” it is not unusual to feel overwhelmed and alone. By allowing the present moment experience to enter our thoughts we enlarge the context of our own particular struggles. The ups and down of our existence are all part of a much larger journey. When we become more mindful, we can live more peacefully in our own lives. Awareness only requires that we *pay attention* and see things as they are. It doesn’t require that we change things or that we engage in any activities that produce an agenda.

Seven Attitudes of Mindfulness Practice

1. Non-judging

Mindfulness is cultivated by assuming that each person is an impartial witness to his/her own experience. It requires that you become aware of the constant stream of judging and reacting to inner and outer experiences that we are all caught up in and ***LEARN TO STEP BACK FROM THE JUDGING OF GOOD OR BAD.***

2. Patience

Accepting the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time. In the same way we can learn to cultivate patience toward our own minds and intentionally remind ourselves that there is no need to hurry things or to be impatient with ourselves. We become tense, agitated or frightened because we have not met the demands that we impose upon ourselves quickly enough. We should take the time to give ourselves enough room to have experiences and to accept them as they are.

3. Beginners Mind

A “beginners mind” is one that is willing to see everything as if for the first time. It reminds us that no moment is the same as any other, each is unique and contains unique possibilities.

4. Trust

Developing a basic trust in yourself and your feelings is an important part of mindfulness practice. It means developing an attitude of trusting yourself and your own basic wisdom and goodness throughout the process. It might be difficult at first to feel that you are your own person and understand what it means to “be yourself”. The more you engage in trusting your own being, the easier it will be to trust other people and to understand their basic needs and desires.

5. Non-Striving

Practically everything we do has a purpose, to get something or to go somewhere. Mindfulness is different from any other activity because it is essentially a practice of non-activity. It has no particular goal except for you to find your true essence and accept who you are. When we practice mindfulness we are simply allowing anything and everything that we experience from moment to moment to be in our mind and to acknowledge it without judgment or regard.

6. Acceptance

Acceptance means seeing things as they actually are, in the present. It means moving through any emotion-filled periods of anger, stress or fear. By cultivating acceptance we are making space for a healing process to begin. It doesn't mean that we are happy with everything that “is” but we become resigned to tolerating things ‘as they are’.

7. Letting Go

This might be the hardest to achieve..letting go means working with the attitude that there are thoughts and feelings and experiences that we hold on to because they soothe our hurts and calm our fears. Letting go insists that we let our experience be what it is and practice observing it from moment-to-moment. It is a way of letting things be, of accepting things as they are.

“THE ATTAINMENT OF WHOLENESS REQUIRES ONE TO STAKE ONE’S WHOLE BEING. NOTHING LESS WILL DO; THERE CAN BE NO EASIER CONDITIONS, NO SUBSTITUTES, NO COMPROMISES”

C. G. JUNG