

Mindfulness Skills

Mindfulness is about keeping your awareness in the current moment most of the time. It is about being present and aware in your life today.

What has happened in the past has already happened. It can't be changed. It is possible to learn from the past, reflect on the past, or just have a memory of the past.

Since the future hasn't happened yet, there is no point in excessively worrying about what hasn't yet come. However, it is effective to plan and prepare for the future.

Being in the past and future intentionally is optimal. If you live your life mindlessly in the past or future, you can miss out on really important things going on right now.

Mindfulness would say: "If you are going to spend time and energy focusing in the past and future; do it intentionally and with full awareness. However, spend most of your time in the present moment, in the here and now, in today. This allows you to fully experience your life as it is happening.

Square Breathing

Do this skill mindfully, with full awareness, focusing only on your breathing,. If you notice your mind wandering, just notice and bring yourself back to your breathing. By taking these long, slow, deep breaths you will get more air into your lungs which will get more air to your muscles, which will reduce tension and more air to your brain so that you can think a bit more clearly.

1. Breathe in while counting to 4.
2. Hold your breath while counting to 4.
3. Exhale while counting to 4.
4. Repeat 4 times.

Observe & Describe

These two skills are about noticing what is going on inside and outside. Start by focusing on the here & now. Let go of any thoughts about the past or future. Just be present right now. If thought come in, notice them and then let them go as if you were watching clouds floating by.

Let's take a moment to check in on the inside and outside. An important part of this process is staying non-judgmental. This means not assigning a value to yourself or others (good, bad, stupid, worthless, etc.). Stick to the facts; avoid labeling.

1. Notice what is going on inside (sensations and thoughts). Notice any judgments you are making and let them go.

2. Describe what you notice in concrete, specific terms that are non-judgmental.
3. Notice what is going on around you. Let go of judgments you are making about your environment or other people.
4. Describe what you notice in concrete, specific terms that are non-judgmental.

Moment to Pause

This skill is about taking a moment to check in with yourself on both the inside and outside. By checking in, you can be responsive to what is going on and act in your own best interest.

You may feel like taking this moment will take a lot of effort and really slow you down; however, once you learn this skill, you can do it in a couple of seconds.

1. Take a deep breath, notice thoughts, feeling, and impulses. Then take another breath to consider what is going on around you including interactions with others. Once you consider both of these things, you can decide what you want to do and say. You realize that you can act in a way that is most useful or effective.
2. Or – Count to 3 while noticing what is going on inside. Next, count to 6 while checking in on the outside. Last, decide what to say and what to do that will be most effective.

Participate

This skill is about participating fully in one activity at a time. It is about being active and involved in life. Fully participating may mean that you have to challenge yourself to come out of your shell, face your fears, or combat your impulse to withdraw.

By being present in the here and now on the inside and around me in a non-judgmental fashion, you can invest in relationships, situations, and activities fully.

Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is about being fully present in the experience of eating. It is also about being non-judgmental with yourself before, during, and after eating.

1. Just eat, don't do anything else.
2. Notice what food looks like.
3. Notice the scents and smells of food.
4. Notice what it feels like in your hand or with a utensil.
5. Notice the weight, texture, and other sensations of the food in your mouth.
6. Notice salivation, taste, and any smells.
7. Chew each bite really well: 10, 15, or 20 chews
8. Continue to eat the rest of your food by paying attention to all these experiences and sensations.

9. Notice any feelings of food in your stomach.
10. Notice feeling full and satiated.

Practice this experience with meals and snacks. Especially notice the skill when you eat something small that you typically eat in handfuls: dried fruit, popcorn, nuts, chocolate, or chips.

One-Mindfully

This is the skill of focusing on one thing in the moment. While it might seem that multi-tasking is efficient, it is actually more effective to do one thing at a time, focusing on each thing by itself, than moving on to the next task. This can be done slowly or quickly depending on the tasks and your energy level.

Practice living one-mindfully. The next time you are in a conversation with someone, focus all your attention on the very moment you are in with that person. The next time you take a break, actually take a break.

Body Scan

This exercise helps with grounding. First, go inside. Notice any pain, tension, or discomfort. Do not do anything about it, just make space for it. Second, notice any sensations of feeling at ease, relaxed, or comfortable. Do not try to create it; just make space for even the smallest amount. Third, notice any neutral sensations. The neutral sensations are the things you do not normally notice because they are neutral. Feel all the different sensations on the inside for a few moments.

Now, turn your attention to the outside. Notice your feet on the ground and notice your body on the furniture. Notice your environment with your 5 senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, perhaps smell and taste. Become aware of any people around you. Take a few more moments to be present with yourself on the outside, then one more moment on the inside.

Turtling

Turtles use a variety of strategies to take care of themselves. They withdraw inside themselves and re-emerge cautiously. They protect themselves through snapping and biting. They are adaptive by living in water and on land. They let things roll off their hard outer shell. They move slowly and intentionally and they are persistently self-righting. When turtles are self-righting, they will use any support they can find to flip themselves over when life has turned them upside-down.

Find a variety of turtling strategies you can use to take care of yourself.

Wise Mind

This is about balancing thinking and feeling. We are most effective in our lives when we have both thinking and feeling in our experience.

1. Note the benefits of being almost entirely in the emotional mind.
2. Note the benefits of being almost entirely in the emotional mind.
3. Note the benefits of being almost entirely in the rational mind.
4. Note the benefits of being almost entirely in the rational mind.
5. Note the benefits of being almost entirely in the “wise” mind.
6. Note the benefits of being almost entirely in the “wise” mind.

Non-Judgmental

Being non-judgmental is about not assigning a value to yourself or others such as being good, bad, terrible, unlovable. Making judgments or assigning value to yourself or others causes unnecessary and unhelpful distress and discomfort.

Behavior can be judged as good or bad, right or wrong, useful or useless, but it is unnecessary to judge the person engaging in the behavior. Instead of making judgments, describe what is going on, how you feel about it, and how you want to respond to it, without assigning value to yourself or others.

Positive judgments can be as problematic as negative judgments. If you judge positively, you are at risk of also making negative judgments. The best advice is to skip the judgment, describe what is going on and identify your feelings.

1. Name judgments you make about yourself.
2. Describe replacement descriptions (without judgment).
3. Name judgments you make about others.
4. Describe replacement descriptions of others (without judgment).