

Mindfulness is about letting go of doing. It is about simply being as you are. There are different ways to be mindful. Using these exercises regularly will deepen your awareness and help you gain perspective.

MINDFULNESS AND THOUGHTS

Often we can't control the thoughts that keep pouring into our minds. Sometimes this stream of thought is like a non-stop, never-ending loop of information and judgements. When you consider it you will find you are actually aware of your thoughts. You can think about thinking.

You are not your thoughts. When truly mindful, you do not attach meaning to thoughts. Nor do you react to them. You just observe them and accept them without judgement.

■ Tool 1: Mindful Breathing

Breathing is at the heart of mindfulness. It allows you the opportunity to 'tune in' to your body, mind and heart. Try this exercise for 3 minutes. Sit up straight and focus for as long as you can. Take a few deep breaths to calm your mind and centre yourself.

Awareness: Reflect on the following questions

- ◆ What emotions am I aware of at the moment? Where in my body am I feeling these emotions?
- ◆ Now scan your body. What sensations are you aware of at this moment? Acknowledge these sensations without judgement.
- ◆ What thoughts are you aware of? Just observe your thoughts. Do not judge them as being positive or negative. Simply experience them and then let them go.

Breathing: Bring your attention to your breathing. Notice your in-breath and your out-breath. You don't need to change your breathing just become mindful of it. If your mind is wandering away gently guide your attention back to your breath.

Focus your senses on the pathway the breath takes as it enters your body. Feel your breath fill your body full of energy. Observe the breath as it makes its way back out of your body and dissipates into world.

MINDFULNESS AND EMOTIONS

You can observe your emotions in the same way you can observe your thoughts. This leads to the same realisation – you are not your emotions.

There is a significant difference between you and your emotions and the practice of mindfulness can help you to recognise the difference between the two.

In mindfulness you are invited to both acknowledge and to give mindful attention to your feelings, rather than avoiding them or reacting to them. This is a powerful technique that is capable of reducing the strength and intensity of painful emotions.

■ Tool 2: Mindful Feeling

When you are experiencing a strong feeling such as stress, anger or sadness try the following

- ◆ Purposefully sense the emotion (become aware of it, sit with it and don't run from it)
- ◆ Feel the emotion (open up to the emotion with compassion, kindness and acceptance)
- ◆ Be the observer and step back from the feeling (see yourself separating from the emotion)
- ◆ Breathe (bring your attention back to your breath, noticing the in-breath and out-breath)

■ Tool 3: Mindful Loving Kindness

Mindfulness is about being compassionate and loving to ourselves. Find a place where you feel secure, safe and warm. Notice your in-breath and your out-breath. Allow phrases to come from your heart around things you deserve for yourself for example:

- ◆ 'May I have compassion'
- ◆ 'May I be healthy'
- ◆ 'May I be accepting'
- ◆ 'May I be happy'
- ◆ 'May I be of sound body and mind'
- ◆ 'May I thrive'

Over and over repeat these phrases again to allow them to permeate your heart. Allow your heartfelt expression to generate loving kindness towards yourself. If it doesn't happen - don't worry - your intention is more important than the feeling.

Now bring your mind to somebody you care about. Picture the person and then with your good intention say the same phrases sending goodwill to the other person. For example: 'May you have compassion'.

This can be a very healing practice. Allow yourself to practise it slowly with compassion.