


MINDFULNESS



Mindfulness is a practice and a way of being. As a *practice* it involves moment by moment attention, without judgement, in the present moment. As a *way of being* it is the awareness that emerges through this practice. It involves open, curious and kind orientation to oneself and the external world ... to be in a caring relationship with our inner world (thoughts, feelings, moods, bodily sensations), with others and with the external environment. It is the basic human quality of being alert and awake – the opposite to being on automatic pilot.

It is important to remember that mindfulness incorporates 'heartfulness'. It is warm and caring as well as clear and directed.

Mindfulness is the “awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2003

How to develop mindfulness?

There are many techniques designed to develop mindfulness both through meditation and in daily life. **Formal mindfulness meditation practices** are periods dedicated to the development of particular mental orientations e.g. non-judgemental awareness of the present moment. These are often done sitting down with one's attention on a particular object (e.g. breath or bodily sensations). Through this we hone our ability to focus and be still. Other meditations develop a broader awareness and insight. Particular meditations also develop positive mental states such as compassion, gratitude and kindness.

Accompanying the formal mindful meditation practice are **informal mindfulness practices**. Much of the time we go about our daily activities with our minds somewhere else – in regrets about the past and worries about the future. Informal mindfulness practice asks us to be aware of what is happening now. For example, to really know that we are stacking the dishwasher – to feel the plates, be aware of where we place them – to be present to that experience. We can commit to doing certain daily activities more mindfully.

What will mindfulness do for me?

Developing our capacity to know and be with our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations and attitudes in a non-judgemental (open and kind) way has been shown to enhance our physical, mental and emotional health. Flexibility and creativity are enhanced.

Through systematic training of the mind and cultivation of positive aspects of the mind/heart we can have greater choice over any unhelpful habits and patterns we have acquired. We develop more positive inclinations and move from being a slave of our thoughts/emotions to having greater control over our responses. Mindfulness increases our capacity to deal with those difficult situations that life inevitably throws our way, with balance and calm.

Belief framework

Mindfulness meditation asks us to investigate for ourselves how the mind, emotions and body operate. It does not require that we accept any given set of beliefs but encourages us to become our own teacher. We do this in a curious and compassionate way bringing to this investigation a friendly interest.

“In this very moment, no matter what your condition or situation, you have within you all the resources you need for growing, healing, and working with stress, pain, illness, and the everyday challenges you are facing. A growing body of scientific evidence supports the reality of a profound mind-body connection and now recognizes that learning and practicing mindfulness can positively affect your sense of health and well-being physically, mentally, and emotionally, while simultaneously offering you a means of discovering a deeper sense of ease and peace of mind.” Saki Santorelli, Centre for Mindfulness, University of Massachusetts