

Audio Exercise 1: Introduction to Mindfulness

In these recordings we will explore a range of mindfulness strategies that you can use and, with practice, adapt to a variety of settings and circumstances. Using the recordings as a starting point will help you get into the practice and discipline of becoming mindful.

This raises the question of what mindfulness is. There are a few definitions. One way of understanding mindfulness is that it is a particular way of paying attention to the present moment. That may be the present moment experience of yourself in your own body; your bodily, physical sensations that occur moment by moment. It may be an awareness in the present moment of your thoughts and emotions. It may be a present moment awareness of the world around you; of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and the tactile experience of the world around you. It might be a moment by moment unfolding of awareness of a number of these domains at the same time.

One of the things that characterises the practice of mindfulness is that it's not just noticing, it's noticing and being aware in a particular way. It's observing with curiosity, without judgment, and without deciding whether a particular present moment experience is right or wrong, good or bad. Yes, there may be feelings of comfort or of discomfort, but that doesn't mean the experience is 'bad' or 'good,' in and of itself.

Most of the time we live our lives 'mindlessly.' We are literally 'out of ourselves,' we are out of the present moment. We are thinking about the future, or worried about what has been going on in our lives recently, or having painful, difficult thoughts about the past.

By cultivating and practicing mindfulness we develop the capacity, which is in all of us, to come back to the present moment. When you think about it, ultimately the only time we can live in is the present.

If we think about the past, we're always thinking about the past from the present moment. If we're worrying about the future (and a good definition of anxiety is worrying about things that haven't yet happened), we actually still do that from the present moment.

There has been a lot of research in recent years indicating the effectiveness of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness has been considered helpful for improving issues like depression, high levels of stress or distress, anxiety. Mindfulness can be helpful for people who have experienced deeply painful traumatic events.

Having said that, mindfulness is not a way of getting rid of the events, memories or feelings associated with painful parts of life, but to move towards a place where there is less suffering as a result of these.

In the recordings we will look at a variety of mindfulness practices.

You are encouraged to explore them, decide which ones feel most comfortable for you, which ones seem right for you at this time in your life. Practice them and use them as a way of grounding yourself in the present.

You are encouraged to develop your own mindfulness strategies. Use these recordings as a starting point. There is no right or wrong when it comes to mindfulness. There is no pass or fail, no mark out of 10. It works differently for everyone.

For some people it's about finding a quiet safe space and giving themselves 20 minutes, half an hour, or even longer, to become mindful. For others it might just be a few seconds, a

minute at a time - many moments of checking in briefly with your experience in the 'here' and 'now.'

Some days it may come more easily than others. Try not to judge yourself, or your performance, as you do these exercises. The experience of trying them out is in itself an act of mindfulness, and that is sufficient.

If you try one of the exercises and it's not useful to you right then, just leave it be. You may wish to come back to it at a later time and try it again (and you might not).

If there's a particular one you do find useful, use it many times.

If you wish to develop your own, using these exercises as a starting point, that's wonderful.

If at any point during these exercises, because of anything that is happening in your life at that moment, it becomes difficult to continue, simply stop. Look around you, acquaint yourself with your surroundings, and if you wish to come back to the exercise later, or not, that's fine too.

It's absolutely important, as you do these exercises, to be as gentle on yourself as possible. Use them for your own purposes. They're designed for you. Allow them to work for you.