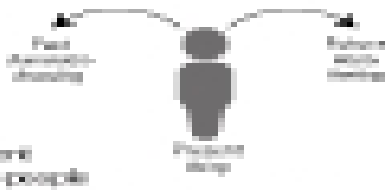
What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the short term for mindfulness meditation practice. This is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditations. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgements about what we notice. Mindfulness meditation practice is key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).

Why should I practice mindfulness?

Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. We often find ourselves ruminating about things that have already happened, or worrying about things that could happen. This can often be distressing.



Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practices can help people cope with a wide variety of feelings states such as depression and anxiety, but also physical health conditions including pain and chronic illness.

Why don't we need to practice? Can't I pay attention to the present moment already?

We can all pay attention to the present moment, at least for a short while. If you haven't tried meditation before, though, you might notice that your attention is reactive and is not easily controlled. Mindfulness strengthens our ability to pay attention to the present moment, but also increases our awareness of how our minds fluctuate, often in unhelpful ways. People who practice mindfulness regularly find that it helps the ability to stay in the present moment without being deflected.

What does it mean to cultivate a non-judgemental attitude?

Shakespeare said "there is nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so", and this is a core idea in therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy. Making judgements about our own experiences can often lead to us becoming quite distressed. For example, thoughts like "this is horrible" and "I can't take any more" are both judgements associated with distress. Practicing mindfulness teaches us to accept aware of our experience without judging it. This has been shown to help people live more fulfilling lives.

Some helpful quotes about mindfulness:

"If you let daily events settle in it will become clear if you let your mind settle your course will also become clear"

- Jack Kornfield, [publication info]

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally"

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Wherever You Go, There You Are (1994)

"The non-judgemental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise"

- Baer, Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice (2003)

"Paying attention to be more active in the present reality"

- Thich Nhat Hanh, The Miracle of Mindfulness (1975)

"Mindfulness is simply a fancy word for noticing - without judgment - what is happening in your present experience"

- Rob Dunn, The Wisdom of Evolution (2010)