

Handout: Meditation - Cultivating Mindfulness

Category	Subcategory	Group size	Duration	Language
Mindfulness	Mindfulness interventions	Individual or group	90 minutes	English

Short introduction

The present moment is the place from which our entire reality is created. Our relationships, communication, work/home life, and other experiences spring forth from our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

But how many of us are truly aware of our thoughts, feelings, and actions that influence our experience and our relationships with others? How many of us have learned to cultivate and grow one of the critical skills that help us to see what is actually happening right now and what is needed as a result? To see what is at the root of our experience and what is (not) to be done?

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, the academic who laid the foundations for the world-renowned MBSR course (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction), “Mindfulness means being aware in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally (Kabat Zinn, 2004).” Another great Mindfulness teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, teaches us that “Mindfulness shows us what is happening in our bodies, our emotions, our minds, and in the world. Through mindfulness, we avoid harming ourselves and others (Nhat Hanh, 2008).”

By becoming more aware, we enhance our capacity to cope with life’s challenges with dignity and elegance. Instead of adding to the confusion or fuelling hate. When we are greedy to end greed or when we hate people who express hateful behaviour, we could actually strengthen the things we are fighting against.

That is not to say that practising mindfulness or awareness is being passive.

We can stand up for our rights, set boundaries, or undertake action while practising mindfulness or awareness, more efficiently and productively. Since we are less likely to be reactive; to fight, flight, or freeze. Reactivity clouds our minds and does not help us to make the best decisions.

Training mindfulness or awareness is beneficial and accessible for almost everyone, everywhere. This is proven by more than 7.000 academic peer-reviewed studies.

For the sake of this project when speaking about the awareness we refer to mindfulness.

As such, awareness is cultivated by practising the three pillars of awareness:

1. Training our awareness
2. Gaining insights into helpful & harmful patterns
3. Enhancing kindness for ourselves and others

Now, let’s practice!



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1. Training our awareness

Training our awareness helps us to invest our time and energy in those things we would like to invest in. Instead of drifting off regularly in thoughts, emotions, or behaviour that does not benefit us.

Training awareness can be done by mindfulness meditation.

Meditation: The simplest way is sitting down comfortably, directing the awareness inward by counting each out-breath until reaching ten. When reaching ten, simply starting again from one. And when losing count, starting from one as well, without judging.

2. Gaining insights into helpful & harmful patterns

Whilst training our awareness, we will be distracted. The awareness tends to drift off and no longer be with the breath.

Practice: Each time the awareness is somewhere else, name where the awareness has gone (e.g. planning, contemplating, remembering, desiring, or resisting) and then return to the breath nonjudgmentally.

Each time we do this we start gaining insights into how and where we invest our energy in, over and over again. And whether the patterns are helpful or harmful.

Each practice round strengthens our ability to be aware of which patterns are present and with the help of the first pillar we can shift our awareness.

3. Enhancing kindness for ourselves and others

Cultivating self-care and self-acceptation helps us to take better care of ourselves and others.

Practice: When meditating do not judge, cling to, or resist thoughts, emotions, or behaviour. Simply let them be. Name them (second pillar), smile and focus the awareness again on the breath (first pillar)

This helps us to be less reactive and to direct our awareness where we would actually like to place it upon.

Practice: 5 or 10 minutes a day is a wonderful start to becoming more skilled with these three pillars and thus to become more aware.

The huge benefit is that they enable us to become aware of what is really happening and what is really needed, in all sorts of situations. This is necessary because when people display aggressive behaviour there are often unmet needs, for everyone involved. Being able to see what those unmet needs are, helps us to investigate what is a possible solution for the situation. This requires awareness.

But when we are reactive and respond with a fight-, flight- or freeze reaction we tend to worsen things, for one or more parties.

So becoming aware is our first step. When aware we can better access those parts of the brain that help us far better with problem-solving. It also helps us to apply communication techniques more effectively.

Non-violent communication is One of the techniques that has proven itself extremely useful when there is aggression involved.

4. Putting it all together: A Mindfulness meditation focussed on the three pillars



Let's sit in a position that is easy and also expresses attentiveness and a certain dignity.

Invite them back to adopt a straight position and open the chest by gently bringing the shoulder blades together.

Your head is straight on your torso, your chin is slightly retracted and you can imagine that a string is attached to your crown that you pull up very gently. Your hands rest somewhere on your thighs with the palms facing up or down.

Experiment with your posture until you radiate a certain presence.

Experiment with this powerful attitude.

Breathe in and out 3x deeply and quietly, and then let the breath find its natural rhythm. You don't have to do anything about this.

Close your eyes

With the realization that we are already completely okay and that we need not achieve or do anything special

The point is that we give attention and space to how we are now and who we are today. Time for ourselves.

And now bring attention to sitting. Feel how your weight presses on what you are sitting on.

The contact of your legs or feet with the ground.

Not only sitting but also feeling that you are sitting,

Here, in this moment.

As soon as you bring the attention inward,

You probably notice the movement of the breath.

See if it is possible to follow the next inhalation into your belly and there. To notice how your body moves on the waves of your breath. And how that breathing is constantly changing.

You can also put a hand on your belly to tune in to this region.

And stay present for the full duration of the inhaling and the exhaling.

Give your full attention to the rising and falling of the abdomen during inhalation and exhalation.

In doing so, just let breathing take its course and do not attempt to control or manipulate them in any way

Sometimes short, sometimes long, sometimes deep, sometimes superficial, and sometimes a sigh.

Simply allow the breath to breathe itself.

You don't have to achieve anything.

You don't have to do anything special.

Simply allow your experience to be your experience.

Being fully present with the changing bodily sensations.

While your breath enters your body

And your breath leaves your body.

Possibly you can sense the breath

support by naming the inhalation with IN and the exhalation with OFF.

Very softly like a whisper in the background.

Focusing attention in the first place

feeling the breath at the abdomen or chest if you notice that it is difficult to observe the movement of your abdomen.

You have probably already noticed that you often stray
in thoughts, plans or worries, dreams, or sounds.

This is all ok.

This is what the mind does.

You can observe and name this kindly:

Oh yes, thinking..

Oh yes, planning....

Oh yes, hearing...

And then without judgment and determination
bring your attention back to your belly.

In addition, renew your intention
to be all the way here.

With this inhalation

And this exhalation.

No matter how often you notice that your attention is wandering,
give yourself a compliment every time
that you are awake again
and that you are in contact with your current experience.

Your mind might be distracted a 1000 times in 1 meditation.

That is what the mind is used to.



The purpose of meditation is not so much to be without thoughts,
but becoming aware when thoughts or other experiences come.

And be prepared to bring attention back to the belly.

By becoming aware of it, you create freedom and choice.

You can always start again in a friendly and determined way.

Just keep the attention to the movement of the abdomen with softness
from moment to moment.

Breathe per breath.

Without comparison.

Without anticipating.

Without judgment.

Simply open for every new moment.

Be present for the full duration of inhalation and the full duration of exhalation.

And also observe the breaks

And see if you can further expand the field of your attention to your flanks.

And feel your entire belly.

The changing pattern of physical sensations in your stomach
during inhalation and exhalation.

Now focus your attention on your lower back
and examine with mildness what you experience here, without preference, aversion, or judgment
and perhaps also feel how your lower back moves very gently
when inhaling and exhaling.

And now both your belly and your lower back in the field of your awareness.

With all sensations as they change from moment to moment
and feel it with a certain curiosity from the inside.

And bring your awareness to your chest and observe this region of your body.



Feel what is here and how this region also moves to the rhythm of the breath.

Observing in silence

without judgment

and open and soften to what you feel.

Now let the field of your awareness extend to the upper back

and here also examine and breathe with what you feel.

If you notice that your attention is being taken away by thoughts,

resolutely zoom your attention back into this region of your body.

Bringing your attention to your shoulders

and observe how the shoulders move during the breathing process.

See if you can expand the field of your awareness so that it covers your entire torso:

the abdomen, lower back, chest, upper back, shoulders

and observe the movement of breath throughout this region.

And expand the field of your awareness even further

so that it also covers your arms

and your legs

and your head.

Your body as a whole is now in the foreground in the field of your awareness.

Your body sitting here and breathing.

If you notice that your attention is taken

by sounds, memories, plans, or reactions to what you feel, or other thoughts,

coming back to feeling your body as a whole without judgment.

And anchor / centre your attention in your body.

Also, zoom in on the contours of your body.



And perhaps feel the movement of breathing from your head to your toes.

Sit here with the feel of your body as a whole.

Fully aware of this moment.

And from this moment

And from this moment

And now return the field of your attention

and zooming in on the changing pattern of physical sensations at the abdomen.

Be present for the full duration of the inhalation

and the full duration of the exhalation.

And renew your intention to get into these final moments

to keep your attention completely.

And now give yourself a big compliment for

the time you have taken to be normal.

And maybe a little of this is allowed in your day,

Knowing that you can use the breath as an anchor for this.

And in this way live every moment of your life with greater attention,

whether you are talking, taking a shower,

drive by car or wait at the checkout.

These are all opportunities to make deeper contact with the here and now.

And so is hearing the bell an invitation to keep your attention to your breath until after the third ring signal and then come back at your own pace and way with your attention to this space.

5. Questions and answers

Please provide time for questions and answers. Perhaps use some of the following:

Tips for beginners

1. Focus on developing awareness

At the beginning of your practice, your mind will literally be all over the place. You'll seem to have a new thought or some other distraction every few seconds.



This is perfectly normal. I went through the same thing at first. It took time to quiet my own mind as well as develop my awareness, but it was well worth it. Simply quieting the mind can bring you a great sense of peace and happiness.

2. Pick simple objects

In the beginning, you're going to want to pick an easy object of meditation. Then once your skill improves you can pick more difficult objects. At first, I'd suggest practising mindful breathing for a couple of weeks.

In the beginning, sit for 10-15 minutes every morning and/or night and simply stop what you're doing for 30-60 seconds every hour or two during your day to practice mindfulness of breath (you don't have to sit to do this) and you'll gradually begin to develop both your ability and establish mindfulness as a habit. Do this for at least 2-3 weeks before trying anything else.

3. Sit often

Sitting meditation really is the cornerstone of all meditative practice. It was my first experience with mindfulness and I'd suggest it be your first experience with meditation as well. Adopting a daily practice of sitting meditation is very important.

4. Go easy on yourself

Mindfulness is an open acceptance of everything, so those thoughts, feelings, and sensations that keep popping into your mind shouldn't be labelled a bad thing. In fact, they aren't a good thing or a bad thing.

5. Prioritize mindfulness

You won't get far in your practice of mindfulness if you don't prioritize it. This goes for anything in life. This is because right from the beginning you'll be clashing with old habits.

The more often we do something the more energy or "pull" it has. This is our habit energy. We all have this habit of energy. What differs from one person to another is where we place this energy.

6. Slow it down

We're taught to move quickly, multitask, and ultimately be as productive as possible. This mentality is ingrained in us. We're so used to rushing around all day that a lot of times we never even realize there's another way to live. We think that it's "just how life is". But it's not. And of course, part of the point of mindfulness and meditation is to calm the mind.

7. Be patient

Mindfulness takes time and patience to develop. At first, it will be subtle.

8. Let go

When you begin your mindfulness practise (or if you have already) you'll probably find it extraordinarily difficult not to become distracted. We covered this earlier, so it shouldn't be of any surprise.

But something else will likely happen. You'll have a hard time *convincing yourself* to let go of these distractions.

9. Have fun

It's one of the most important points on this list. Why? Because **when we enjoy something our drive to do that thing increases tenfold**. Luckily, for the most part, this will come naturally when practising mindfulness.

10. Don't accept the excuses you give yourself as to why mindfulness isn't for you. If you can't sit still, you need mindfulness the most.



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