

MINDFULNESS

Paying attention to something,
in a particular way,
on purpose,
in the present moment,
non-judgmentally
–Jon Kabat-Zinn

Paying attention to something often begins with paying attention to the breath, but it could also be paying attention to your surroundings, driving, eating, washing the dishes, your thoughts or emotions, taking a shower, your physical body, etc.

In a particular way means focusing your attention, whether it be closing your eyes and going within, looking at something, listening, tasting, smelling, or touching.

On purpose simply means that you set the intention and decide to pay attention to this specific “something .”

In the present moment means right now, while dismissing thoughts of the past or future that arise in the present.

Non-judgmentally means without assessing. It means not to compare, judge, or be critical of yourself or what arises while paying attention.

Think of examples of how you might do each part of the definition.

1. Choose something to pay attention to.
2. How will you focus on it (looking, listening, touching, etc.)?
3. Once you have set the intention (i.e., choosing) to focus on something, you can then focus on purpose. Because you have chosen to focus, you are engaging purposefully in mindfulness.
4. How will you stay in the present moment? One method is to say to yourself, “thinking,” when you notice you have wandered into thought about the past or the future, and gently bring your attention back to the object of focus.
5. Non-judgment means both being willing to allow whatever arises in your attention and not judging your mind for wanting to judge whatever arises.

All humans judge their experiences, other humans, and themselves. Mindfulness trains the mind to be aware of its own tendencies and to let go of judgments. The result is not absence of thinking, rather better focus and improved ability to stay in the present.

Ongoing mindfulness practice can help you recognize the transient nature of all experiences from one moment to the next. This recognition of the flow of experience can help build tolerance for disturbing thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, such as anger, anxiety, and stress. Nonjudgmental present-moment awareness can also help you cope with these experiences without the added suffering of struggling against them. Similarly, mindfulness can facilitate greater acceptance of the challenges of life and painful memories. As an added benefit, the sustained attention and concentration cultivated in mindfulness practice can help bring focus to all other activities and areas of life. In short, mindfulness can help you become aware of regrets about the past, worries about the future, anxiety, fear, and other unpleasant internal experiences in an accepting manner, ultimately enabling you to identify your values and engage in committed action in a more present and flexible way.

Write your own definition of mindfulness in words that resonate with you. Consider how mindfulness could enhance your life and support your goals.