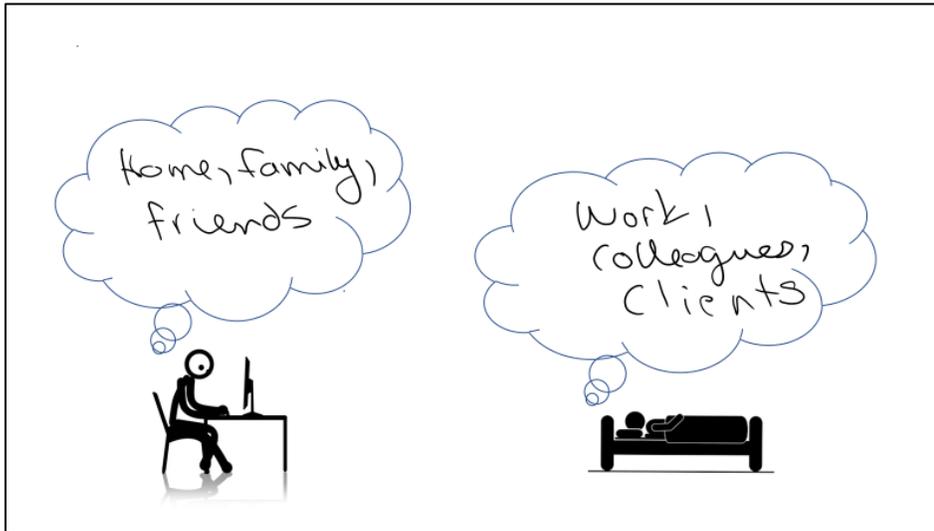


What is mindfulness?

It sometimes seems easier to define “not mindfulness” than it is to define “mindfulness”. Perhaps the diagram below is familiar to you? Most of us have times in our day when our bodies are physically in the present moment, but our minds are literally some place else. We are at work, but our minds are home, with our family or friends, or time-travelling to past memories or future worries.



Mindfulness is the awareness that arises when we are paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally. This kind of awareness nurtures greater clarity and acceptance of present moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of these moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realise the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.

Jon Kabat Zinn (the founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction)

Mindfulness is a state of being which is accessible to every one of us. It is also a skill which we can cultivate more deeply in our lives. Some experience of mindful presence will have been felt by all of us at some point, but perhaps we did not know what it was when we experienced it.

Perhaps we have felt this in more peaceful moments, when we have been present in places of natural beauty, and simply “breathing it in”, whether this was a beautiful sunset or standing next to the sea or a waterfall. Perhaps we have felt this in some heightened moments, being with a loved one, during the birth of a child, or even being present with someone who is dying. These are the moments we may be more likely to remember and are less likely to be distracted by other more trivial concerns. Maybe we have just felt qualities of such mindful presence when we have been fully engaged in an activity which we love, playing a musical instrument, dancing, riding a horse, or sitting on a sunny plaza on holiday, sipping a cappuccino.

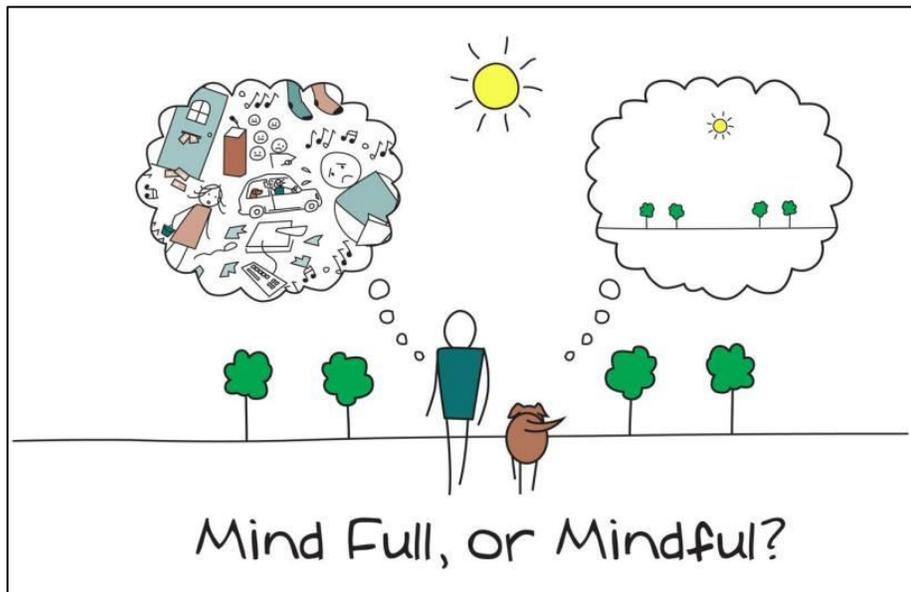
We will be aware that this is not perhaps our usual mode of operation. During our stressful lives, our attention is usually dispersed. We are usually busy juggling a number of tasks and pre-occupations at the same time, and none of our actions or thoughts receives our full attention. We are usually leaping stressfully from one thing to the next...being distracted, day-dreaming, being caught up in our thoughts and worries about what happened yesterday and what we need to do tomorrow, only giving things half of our attention, not hearing fully what is said to us, pre-occupied with our own issues and concerns, judging our experiences constantly as good or bad according to our own preferences and often reacting against the way things actually are. This is our ordinary state of mind and not exactly a peaceful one. We can spend a good

Inspiration

part of our lives like this, not being fully present and therefore missing most of the moments in which we live. It sometimes feels as if we are “living in our heads” and our bodies are just vehicles for getting us around.

When we can get in touch with qualities of mindfulness, we will feel a sense of coming back home to ourselves in a more meaningful way. We may find we can get in touch with a sense of brightness, clarity of purpose, playfulness, creativity and inner peace. It is said that mindfulness practitioners develop a more optimistic stance in their lives, and a courage which enables them to work with rather than avoid life’s challenges. Certainly, mindfulness is not just about having more blissful moments, it is about being more fully present in our lives, remaining curious, embracing all of our experiences, and most importantly, changing the relationship we have towards our suffering.

... from Jon Kabat Zinn



Home Practice For the Week Following Session 1

Check out Andy Puddicombe on YouTube - "All it takes is 10 minutes".

https://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes?language=en

Mindfulness (similar to application development!) is something learned through practice, not through study. The purpose in these practices is not just to learn to meditate. The hope is that training our attention through meditation practice helps us to become more aware of experience in other parts of our lives. Do your best to complete the home practice a few times in the week after home practice and be curious about what happens for you!

1. **Formal Mindfulness Practice: carve out time for a Body Scan practice every day or at least a few times.** Set aside a regular time, turn off the phone, and follow along with one of the recordings on the program web page. It may be pleasant, or not. Sometimes we just notice how tense and restless the body is, or how bored or distracted the mind is. But, whatever, or however it is, make the commitment to just do the practice, whether you like it or not. Please note that if you would like to keep the recording for ongoing use, you should download it as the web site will only be live for one month following the completion of the program.
2. **Practice informal mindfulness** - by which we mean bringing full awareness of the experience to some routine everyday activity, just as we did with the "Raisin Awareness" exercise (pun intended). For example,
 1. Drinking your morning coffee or tea: connect with this rich sensory experience – the smell of the beverage, the taste, the texture, the temperature...you get the idea.
 2. Driving the car or taking transit (or even biking!): Take off your headphones or turn off the car's audio and Bluetooth and be present to everything that is going on around you, perhaps taking special notice of the sensations created by movement. How is this different than your usual commute?
 3. Send an email mindfully: Take a moment to explore the fully experience of sending an email. Notice the sensations of sitting at the computer, your feet on the floor and your hands on the keyboard. Notice your posture and your facial expressions. Notice what you see around you (and not just on the screen!) and what you can hear. Perhaps take 5 seconds before you hit the send button and see what happens (internal commentary unnecessary, but may still happen!)
 4. Attend a meeting (or part of a meeting) mindfully: Turn off email, messaging, and your phone, and notice what it's like to be fully present for one meeting, or even part of a meeting.
3. **Or, another way to bring mindfulness every day is to *make transitions consciously***
 1. On entering the office at the start of the day: spend a couple of minutes observing how you are in this moment – body, thoughts, and emotions. (Try the same when you are leaving at the end of the day).
 2. Getting up from your desk: keep your attention in the body. How does it feel to move from the sitting position to the standing position?
 3. Getting into the car or transit: feel the movement of your body getting into the seat or onto the TTC, notice the sensations of your hand holding the wheel or post or chair... Stop and connect with your breath.
 4. Entering a meeting or getting home after work: Spent a moment really orienting yourself and noticing the experience of this transition—perhaps noticing a change in temperature or other qualities of sensation, as well as the sights and sounds you are experiencing.