

What is Mindfulness?

Ron Siegel, author of *The Mindfulness Solution*, defines mindfulness as “awareness of moment-to-moment experience with acceptance. “ There are many other definitions but I like the simplicity of this one. I want to stress the allowing nature of mindfulness, which gives us the space to *Act* rather than *React*.

Mindfulness practices invite us to be aware of our six senses (hearing, taste, touch, smell, sight, the mind), without judging those experiences or trying to figure them out; we simply allow them to be. We practice returning to this moment, rather than living on autopilot, or in the past or future. When we rehash the past and project a scary future, our inner children suffer. If we can be in the here and now, we can save ourselves anguish:

Common ACA issues	With Mindfulness Practice
“Many adult children are disconnected from their bodies without realizing it.” (BRB)	Notice body signals, feel sensations. We “get in our bodies and into the moment.”
Frozen feelings, “psychic numbing.”	Heed body’s truth & feel.
Reactive, act out, predictable turmoil.	See reactivity, choice in the space, less ruled by pleasant/unpleasant.
Fear, Distorted Thinking	More clarity, reduced fight-flight-freeze response, recognize & let go projection/fear
Addiction to excitement, racing thoughts, in past or future, under critical parent’s spell	Engaged in present moment. Watch thoughts come and go. Aware of critical parent’s voice.
Fight reality (direct experience differs with our thoughts and message from critical parent).	Accept present moment as it is; let go of tension caused by wanting things to be different, of wanting more.

Mindfulness and Emotions

We can learn to allow emotions to arise, experience them, and watch them pass away, without getting hijacked. Mindfulness practice actually changes the brain, so that our fight-flight-freeze response is lessened and our ability to govern our behavior is heightened.

When we’re not mindful of emotions:

- We cut ourselves off from full range of feelings since we’re trying to avoid feeling unpleasant emotions.
- We acknowledge or feel our anger. It gets directed at ourselves.
 - As guilt, a sense of inadequacy.
 - As self-critical thoughts, the critical parent.
- We come alive by attending to feelings right now.
 - Versus speculating as to why it’s happening.
 - Instead of medicating/suppressing/fueling them.

Mindfulness helps us know anger without “reacting” out of it. We can direct our anger at the disease of family dysfunction rather than ourselves. We can redirect the attention we give to our critical parent to reparenting ourselves. We see, with practice, that feelings aren’t fact and that they change continuously.

Mindfulness of Emotion Practice

- Sit in silence and let your eyes close or have a soft gaze.
- See if you can identify what emotions are occurring.
 - How do they manifest in the body? What are the sensations?
 - Do you feel them in your throat, eyes, chest, or belly?
- Pay attention to these emotions and sensations.
 - Name the emotion silently. “Sadness,” “Fear,” “Joy.”
 - Notice what takes you away from the emotion.
 - Gently return to the sensations of the emotion in the body.

When you put feelings into words, according to a UCLA study, you’re activating the prefrontal region and seeing a reduced response in the amygdala (part of our fight-flight-freeze response). Lieberman, lead on the study, says, “In the same way you hit the brake when you’re driving when you see a yellow light, when you put feelings into words, you seem to be hitting the brakes on your emotional responses.”

Integrating Mindfulness of Emotions

- It’s easier to connect with some feelings than others, so try to:
 - Observe emotions throughout day (by using an inventory like the one below or one of the many available apps to track emotions).
 - Notice which emotions you avoid, try to sustain, etc.
- Label emotions in the body – a way to “come home” throughout day.
- Notice which emotions you judge.
- Practice meeting the emotion rather than pushing it away or pushing it to change.
 - If we don’t feed the emotion, it can only go so far.
 - Surf, rather than act on, an emotion in heat of the moment.

Emotions Inventory		
<i>To track emotions you observe throughout the day.</i>		
<i>Adapted from Ronald D. Siegel, Mindfulness Solution book, page 149.</i>		
Trigger & Emotion (sadness, fear, joy, calm, guilt, anger, shame, etc.)	Emotion Strength 1=mild, 2 moderate 3=strong	Reaction to Emotion (push away, hold on, ignore, express, act, etc.)
Family, Partner		
Friends/Social		
Work/School		
Hobby/Leisure		
Other		

Mindfulness – Reparenting in Action

Without mindfulness we get ensnared by the critical parent’s voice and our inner child gets hurt. Mindfulness helps identify the critical parent so we can let it go and nurture our inner child. The attitude for mindfulness practice is that of a loving parent. We meet our experience with kindness **no matter what**. By keeping attention in here and now. Rather than harm our inner child by focusing on past regrets or anticipating scary futures, we reparent ourselves.

Our inner child needs our loving attention – our mindfulness. We can use our habit of judging as a signal to attend to our inner child. When we judge, we can be mindful of how it feels in our body rather than reprimand ourselves.

Reparenting Check-in

This exercise can be done anytime you feel off. Mindfulness alerts us to being off and in the space, we can have a reparenting response rather than repeat the neglect and abuse we were taught as children.

- What emotion(s) are you feeling? What thoughts are you thinking?
- Who is active?
 - Critical parent? Teenager? Inner Child?
- Choose response (may be a mix).
 - Critical parent → let go → nurture inner child
 - Teenager → empathize
 - Inner child → nurture, comfort, reassure

How to begin a mindfulness practice

You’ll derive the most benefit if you practice mindfulness on a regular basis. Set realistic expectations. A few minutes of practice done consistently is better than no practice or many minutes done inconsistently.

Formal practice:

- Mindfulness with object of attention. (Breath, Body, Sound)
- Mindfulness without an object.
 - Helpful to begin by using an object of attention.
 - Then open up to whatever predominates.
- Use labels if useful. (resistance, thinking, etc.)
- Duration: 2 minutes twice a day; increase as tolerated. 20-45 minutes ideal.
- You can follow guided practices in the beginning to help you get a feel for practice. (Suggestions offered at end of handout.)
- Attend a retreat if possible. Mindfulness is a major component of insight Meditation (Vipassana) and centers offering this form of meditation are a good place to begin until secular retreat centers become available.

Informal practice:

- Throughout the day, sense the touch points. Ask, “What’s happening right now?” and then notice whatever is dominant in your awareness. Helps bring you back to the present moment.
- Mindful eating: pay attention to each bite, the taste, etc. Read tips online.
- Mindfulness of thought. Thought labeling.
- Mindful listening: 50% of your attention with speaker, 50% with yourself.
- Mindful Movement

- Walking from one place to another.
- Pick a weekly focus: opening doors, getting into car, washing dishes, showering, brushing teeth, etc.
- Mindfulness of emotion
 - Pick part of the body (neck, jaw, belly).
 - Pick an emotion to notice each week.
 - With emotion in the moment – note in body, sensations.
- Mindful Sex: feel the full sensations of touch, keep your attention on the experience rather than fantasizing, daydreaming, etc.

Benefits of Mindfulness Practice & Research

The real-world benefits that tend to emerge from mindfulness practice are numerous. They include, among many others, a greater sense of ease and wellbeing, less emotional reactivity, lower stress levels, greater empathy, and improved quality of communication with others. These benefits emerge and are maintained by regularly practicing letting go of the need to improve, change, or extend the individual moments of our life. This means we want to watch for the tendency to make mindfulness practice into a relaxation technique. That brings in striving and struggle. Instead, we can practice knowing experience just as it is which will serve our recovery.

For a brief overview of the research supporting mindfulness practice, see <http://marc.ucla.edu/workfiles/pdfs/marc-mindfulness-research-summary.pdf>

Books & Magazines

- *The Mindfulness Solution* by Ron Siegel. Secular.
- *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Bhante Gunaratana. Non-secular.
- Mindful Magazine (www.mindful.com). A subscription magazine with many free online resources. Secular.

Free Guided Meditations

- Meditation Studio app by Muse. Free guided meditations. I like Elisha Goldstein for pure mindfulness practice.
- www.dharmastream.org and app through iTunes. Non-secular.
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center. Secular. <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22&oTopID=22>
- www.speakingoflistening.com. Mostly secular. (Bonnie's website)

Mindfulness Retreats & Distance Learning

- Insight Meditation Society – Barre, MA. <http://www.dharma.org>
- Spirit Rock Meditation Center – Woodacre, CA. <http://www.spiritrock.org>
- Mindful Schools – Oakland, CA. <http://www.mindfulschools.org>
- Online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (free course): <http://palousemindfulness.com/>
- Power of Awareness course - <http://www.soundstrue.com/store/power-of-awareness/>
- Apps: Headspace, 10% happier, Insight Timer