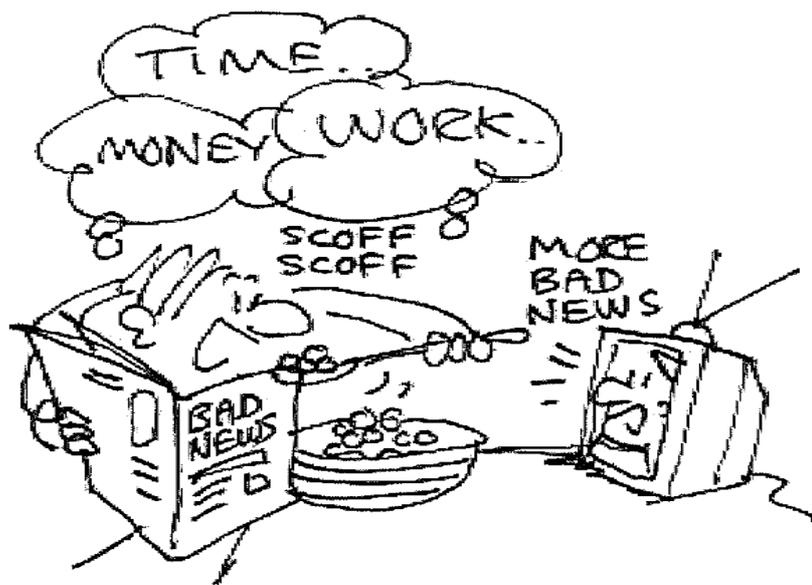


What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention, on purpose, deeply, and without judgement to whatever arises in the present moment, either inside or outside us.

There are many facets to mindfulness but living in the present moment is one of the most important factors to remember. This involves engaging fully in what you are doing without:

- getting lost in your unrelated thoughts, (judgements, memories, worries, future scenarios etc)
- getting caught up or swept away in your feelings (sadness, anger, resentment etc)
- getting distracted by any physical discomfort.

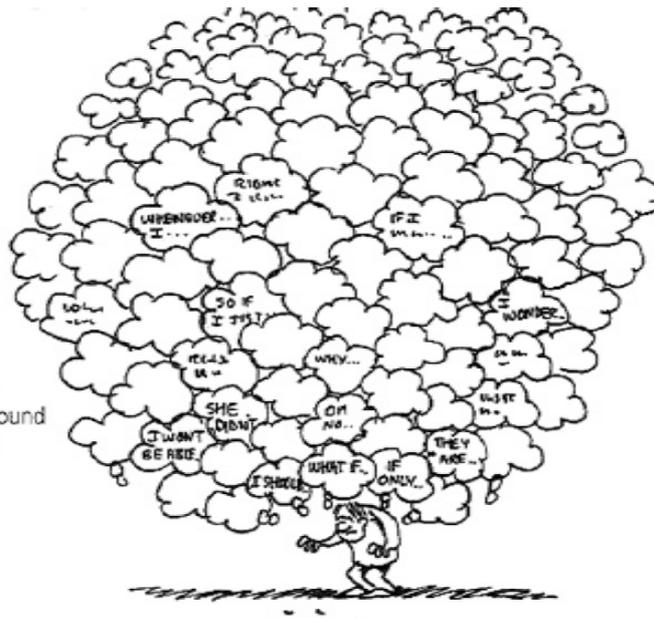


How can Mindfulness help us with our relationships?

We can't change other people or what they do, but we can control our reactions and how we approach our relationships.

For example, when we adopt Mindfulness strategies, instead of picking a fight with our partner after a stressful day at work, we can have a beneficial conversation about an important issue. Instead of shaking in anger when our partner makes a snarky remark, we can respond calmly. Mindfulness is not about replacing emotions – we still have our emotions, we just don't let them control our actions.

It is estimated that the average person thinks around 60,000 thoughts every day!



Did you know?

We have up to 60,000 thoughts a day. Ninety per cent of these we had yesterday, the day before, and the day before that...

Some of these thoughts might be fearful, judgemental and critical, and some of them might be positive, grateful, considerate, cooperative etc. If we are unconscious, or not mindful, we are likely to get hooked into believing that each thought is the truth and reactions occur in our bodies with sensations and feelings in line with the thoughts. We may be in a habit of getting hooked predominantly to the fearful, judgemental or anxious thoughts, act on these thoughts with damaging consequences, and then wonder why our relationships are not working for us.

Imagine your mind says:

“He’s not listening to me. It is obvious he doesn’t care”, or “She is so selfish! I can’t take this anymore” or “He/she should/n’t...”

What are some feelings you might feel and what are some things you might do if you believe or dwell on these thoughts?

When we are fused to our thoughts, we are like puppets jerked around by thoughts and reactions (to take care of or protect our feelings) to the situations in which we find ourselves.

How do we de-fuse or unhook from our unhelpful thoughts?

- Notice what your mind is saying
- Observe the thoughts coming and going
- Notice when you have got ‘hooked’
- Say something like “my mind just had the thought....”
- Practise mindfulness exercises that help you detach from your repetitive thoughts.

Exercise: Leaves on a stream, a cognitive defusion exercise

1. Sit in a comfortable position and either close your eyes or rest them gently on a fixed spot in the room.
2. Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface on the water. *Pause 10 seconds.*
3. For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf... let it float by. Do this with each thought – pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.
4. If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again. *Pause 20 seconds.*
5. Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don't try to speed it up and rush your thoughts along. You're not trying to rush the leaves along or "get rid" of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace.
6. If your mind says "This is dumb," "I'm bored," or "I'm not doing this right" place those thoughts on leaves, too, and let them pass. *Pause 20 seconds.*
7. If a leaf gets stuck, allow it to hang around until it's ready to float by. If the thought comes up again, watch it float by another time. *Pause 20 seconds.*
8. If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, "I notice myself having a feeling of boredom/impatience/frustration." Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them float along.
9. From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is normal. As soon as you realise that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the visualisation exercise.

Courtesy of Mindfulness Muse: www.mindfulnessmuse.com/acceptance-and-commitmenttherapy/leaves-on-a-stream-cognitive-defusion-exercise



Painful Feelings

Anger, guilt, hurt, anxiety, fear. No-one likes to experience any of these feelings. They are often under a lot of our habitual, auto-pilot behaviours in our relationships and life. Without awareness, these feelings can way-lay us in trying to be who we would really like to be in our relationships. It is only human to want to block the feelings out, avoid them in whatever way we can. Bringing mindful awareness to the triggered feelings that motivate our reactive behaviour can help us to respond rather than react in our lives, and in our interactions with our loved ones.

So, how do we process our feelings so that they don't cause havoc in our relationships?

First step: Notice the feelings

Then: Acknowledge or name the feelings. Notice any thoughts that accompany the feelings

Next: Breathe, calm yourself, accept and make space for them

Finally: Be in the present and make contact with the world around you – what you can see, hear, touch, taste and smell.

Mindfulness

- ✓ To be fully present, here and now
- ✓ To experience unpleasant thoughts and feelings safely
- ✓ To become aware of what you're avoiding
- ✓ To become more connected to yourself, to others and to the world around you
- ✓ To increase self-awareness
- ✓ To become less disturbed by and less reactive to unpleasant experiences

Benefits for you

- ✓ Improved concentration and reduced obsessive thinking
- ✓ Healthier immune system
- ✓ Improved psychological and physical wellbeing
- ✓ Slower ageing
- ✓ Better emotional balance, less volatility
- ✓ Increased calm and peacefulness
- ✓ Developed self-acceptance and self-compassion

Relationship benefits

- ✓ Chosen responses rather than reactions
- ✓ Empathy and compassion for self and other
- ✓ Understanding and acceptance
- ✓ Real listening and clearer speaking
- ✓ Positive attitude and self-responsibility
- ✓ Intentional focus on what works better for self and other - from 'me' to 'we'
- ✓ Increased connection and heightened sexual experience in intimate relationship

Recommended Reading

- Act with Love - Russ Harris
- The Happiness Trap - Russ Harris
- Act Made Simple - Russ Harris

Visit www.actmindfully.com.au for more information.