

## HANDOUT

# HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a practice. It's something we work toward and do with repetition to master in our own repertoire of skills. One doesn't simply finish being mindful or check it off a list like "mindfulness, done for today!" Instead, understand that mindfulness is a state of mind that you learn to cultivate in your daily life, and you can return to it over and over throughout the day. One of the early pioneers in bringing mindfulness to western health practices, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) defined mindfulness as paying attention (noticing), on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally.

Our hope is to present you with a mindfulness practice that increases your ability to simply notice your private experiences. You can then use your new mindfulness skills to practice creating a distance between you and your painful private experiences through noticing thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories that would trigger you to engage in problematic behaviors.

It means we focus on the paying attention on purpose—noticing! Even if judgments show up for you, our recommendation is that you notice them too. For example, take a look around the environment you're in now; do you see anything that you cannot judge or affix some evaluation to? We'd wager that you likely can't.

Noticing is the skill we seek to increase and that means you can work on your noticing skill (paying attention on purpose) many times throughout your day without needing to close your eyes and focus on your breathing, buy a meditation cushion, or attend a yoga class. Take a few moments out of your day to try one or more of the following:

- Take a breath on purpose, wherever you are, whatever time it may be. Notice the sensations of your breath in your body, and the rise and fall of your chest and belly.
- If you're driving or commuting, turn off any distractions like the radio, song, or podcast you might be listening to. If commuting, put down the game you might be playing, book you're reading, or whatever else you might be doing. Notice what you see, the quality of the light entering the space you're in, the rumble of the seat underneath your body, sounds you can hear, the temperature of the air on your skin.
- When eating, take a moment to slow down and eat purposefully. What flavors do you notice? Take in the smell and texture of your food. Take your time to eat and just notice what that experience is like.
- Even now as you're reading, go slowly with an aim to pay attention and notice your experience. You may notice yourself getting distracted as you read. See if you can pay attention to that and see where your mind goes.

During your morning routine: brushing your teeth, washing, getting dressed, go slowly and pay attention to your experience. What do you notice as you spread toothpaste on your toothbrush? Pay attention to the sensations as the toothpaste makes contact with your teeth or tongue.

As you learn to practice mindfulness, you may find judgments show up. For instance, as you become more familiar with how your attention moves around, you might become frustrated with yourself. Even that is an opportunity to notice your experience: what thoughts and feelings show up for you as you notice your attention moving on to something other than what you're doing in the moment? And remember: every moment is an opportunity to be present.