**Practical Mindfulness Online Session**

Professional - Mindfulness Practitioner & Teacher

and

Lived Experience Trainer

Photograph of the whitewash of the sea splashing against pebbles on the beach.  
Photo by Quentin Lagache on Unsplash

**Housekeeping and Group Expectations (LE)**

* Microphones will be on mute unless a group discussion is taking place – this is to reduce background noise
* Confidentiality – what’s said on Zoom, stays on Zoom
* Try not to talk over each other. We know this is more difficult online but we want everyone to feel able to contribute without being interrupted
* Respect other peoples experiences and opinions
* Give space for each other to talk – listen to each other without judgement
* Keep phones on silent (please do pop out to take a call if you need to)
* Honesty
* Don’t feel under pressure to contribute to discussions
* Keep a learning focus and support each other to learn

**Objectives (P)**

* To introduce the principles of Mindfulness
* To provide instructions on mindfulness practices to be used formally and informally
* To explain the uses of mindfulness in daily life and stressful situations
* To ensure confidence with home practice and use of practice record sheets

**What is mindfulness and what does it mean? (LE)**

“Mindfulness means **paying attention** in a particular way; **on purpose**, in the **present moment**, and **non-judgmentally**.”

(Jon Kabat-Zinn)

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**Mindfulness** means to be present. ‘Being in the moment’, experiencing life directly as it unfolds, rather than being distracted, caught up and lost in thought.

**It implies resting the mind in its natural state of awareness, which is free from any bias or judgement.**

It’s about being aware of everything including distractions and discomfort.

(Andy Puddicombe, Get Some Headspace, 2011)

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"**An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies** and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment. That might be something as simple as the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs.

"Another important part of mindfulness is **an awareness of our thoughts and feelings** as they happen moment to moment.

"It's about **allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly**. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives."

(Professor Mark Williams, former director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre) and taken from NHS Moodzone (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness>)

**What practice is…what practice is not (P)**

Mindfulness is a practice based on the bodily experience of the present moment. It’s about taking the focus off the mind and onto the true experience of the moment; whatever may be happening at that time. Although may be a desire to have a particular experience of peace or calm, if the mind becomes attached to achieving a particular outcome, the mind becomes agitated. The experience that we are seeking gets further away from our reach.

As each individual will have a personal experience of mindfulness practice, it’s helpful to just focus on what your bodily experience is. Keep allowing thoughts about what you should be experiencing to enter and pass out of the mind as we practice with any other kind of thought.

Our ‘job’ in mindfulness is to just observe. Observe the sounds of cars passing, planes flying over, the rumble of our stomach. Just to notice these things and experience them as they truly are.

(Quote from Charlotte Joko Beck, Everyday Zen p23

“Practice is not about having nice feelings, happy feelings. It’s not about feeling good as opposed to feeling bad. It’s not an attempt to be anything special or to feel anything special…Practice is very simple. That doesn’t mean it won’t turn our life around…It’s about ourselves…just experience [life] as it is.”

**Mindfulness of the breath meditation (P)**

**Introduction**

Your breath is always with you. It provides you with a mindful meditation tool that you can bring your awareness to at any given moment – no matter where you are!

It’s quite common for you not to pay attention to your breathing until someone draws your attention to it. However, it’s something that we all do moment by moment; we are just not always aware that we are doing it!

By bringing your focus on purpose, in the present moment, to your breath you can anchor yourself to what is taking place right now – right now in this present moment.

It may be that during your mindfulness meditation practice that your mind will wander; thoughts, feelings, sounds may well pop into your head, distracting you from your breathing – but that’s fine. When it does happen, you can just acknowledge it and then bring your focus back to your breath. It doesn’t matter if this happens once or many times – you just kindly and gently bring your attention back to focussing on your breath each time.

Don’t be critical about yourself or even judge yourself if your mind wanders. During meditation you want to be non-judgemental; instead you want to treat yourself with kindness and compassion. After all - this is your gift of time!

**Posture**  
Mindfulness of breath can be carried out sitting up or lying down; the main thing is that you are comfortable, and your back/spine is supported when sitting upright, if possible.

You may choose to close your eyes or keep them open if you are feeling a bit sleepy; or you can opt to slightly close your eyes and gently focus your gaze lower, perhaps to a point on the floor. The thing to remember is that in mindfulness you are not trying to fall asleep but to fall awake.

Position your hands so that they lie gently in your lap; palms up or palms down. Some people find it helps to use a cushion on their lap or to tie a scarf around their waist (to hold their hands in a comfortable position). This helps to support their shoulders; removing any pain or discomfort if they suffer with pain in their shoulders. This is totally optional – the main thing is that you are comfortable.

**Noticing your breath**

Drawing your attention to your breath; take a few deep, gentle breaths; noticing the sensations of each breath as it happens moment by moment.

Turning your attention to your own natural breathing rhythm (not forcing your breath in any way), notice where it is that you first feel the sensation of your breath. Is it around the nostrils where cool air enters and warms air leaves you, in your throat, your chest or perhaps even lower down in your belly – noticing how your belly gently expands as you breathe in and contracts as you breath out.

Bringing your awareness to the breath, notice the sensation of each breath as it happens; allowing your awareness to be there and gently noticing every in and out breath. Not trying to change your natural breathing rhythm in any way – just being aware and noticing your breathing in and out as it happens in the moment.

Continuing this practice, you may find your awareness wandering; caught up in thoughts, the sounds around you or sensations in your body. Knowing that this distraction is fine, accepting it as part of your mindful meditation practice; gently and kindly bring your awareness back to focus on your breath. It doesn’t matter how many times your awareness wanders away, just softly and gently lead it gently back to your breathing.

Continue with this practice for 5-10 minutes. When you are ready to end the practice invite yourself to bring your awareness back into the room and when you are ready, and in your own time, open your eyes and have a gentle stretch.

Take a few moments to reflect on this mindfulness breathing practice; exploring curiously your own personal experiences during the practice and those experiences when your awareness came back into the room.

*(adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn, Full Catastrophe Living, p58)*

**Your Personal (Home Practice) Mindful Practice – Record Form (LE)**

Use this form to keep a record of your mindfulness practice - do at least once daily. Use it also to make a note of any sensations, thoughts/feelings etc. that come up about or during your practice. Remember, it’s important for you to treat yourself gently, with kindness and compassion and not to be judgemental when you are practicing mindfulness. It is not a goal - it’s an ongoing journey!

See which mindful practices suit your daily routine and keep a record on your ‘Personal Toolkit Form’. Also, record the practices that you’re struggling with as a reminder; making sure you don’t forget about them but also acknowledging what difficulties you have engaging with them – but continue to practice them. Some take longer than others to get used to – practice, practice, practice!

| **Day/Date:** | **Mindful Practice:** | **Comments** |
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**Mindfulness object meditation: (LE)  
Focus on a Single Object**

Focussing your attention on a single object is a mindfulness skill that will help you concentrate more fully on the present moment. Remember, one of the biggest traps of being unmindful is that your attention wanders from one thing to the next or from one thought to the next. As a result, you often get lost, distracted and frustrated. This exercise is to help you train your ‘mental muscle’. This means you will continue to learn how to maintain your focus on whatever it is you’re observing. With practice, you’ll get better at focussing your attention, just like an athlete who exercises certain muscles to become stronger.

If during the exercise, your mind starts to wander to thoughts, memories or other sensations; that’s ok. As before in our meditations; don’t criticise or be judgemental just notice when you mind wanders and gently and kindly return your focus to whatever you’re observing.

Pick an object to focus on. Choose something that you can rest on a table, is safe to touch and is emotionally neutral. It can be anything, such as a pen, a flower, a watch, a ring, a cup or something similar. Don’t choose to focus on something that could hurt you or a picture of someone you don’t like. These will stir up too many emotions for you right now.

Find a comfortable place to sit in a room where you won’t be disturbed for a few minutes and put the object on a table in front of you. Turn off any distracting sounds. If you have a stopwatch or an alarm clock, set the timer for 5 minutes. Do this exercise once or twice a day for two weeks, choosing a different object to focus on each time.

**You may want to keep an object you use for this meditation in your pocket or handbag or even leave on your desk or coffee table – it can help remind you to take a mindful pause during the day.**

You can record the instructions in a slow, even voice on an audio-recording device and play them while you’re exploring the object.

**Instructions:**

To begin, sit comfortably and take a few slow, deep breaths. Then, without touching the object, begin looking at it, using your beginner’s mind, and exploring its different surfaces with your eyes. Take your time exploring what it looks like. Then try to imagine the different qualities that the object possesses.

* What does the surface of the object look like?
* Is it shiny or is it dull?
* Does it look smooth or rough?
* Does it look soft or hard?
* Does it have multiple colours or just one colour?
* What else is unique about the way the object *looks?*

Take your time observing the object. Now hold the object in your hand or reach out and touch the object. Begin by noticing the different ways it feels.

* Is it smooth or is it rough?
* Does it have ridges or is it flat?
* Is it soft or is it hard?
* Is it bendable or is it rigid?
* Does the object have areas that feel different from each other?
* What does the temperature of the object feel like?
* If you can hold it in your hand, notice how much it weighs.
* What else do you notice about the way it feels?

Continue exploring the object with both your sight and your sense of touch. Continue to breathe comfortably. When your attention begins to wander, return your focus to the object. Keep on exploring the object until your alarm goes off or until you have fully explored all the qualities of the object.

**7 attitudes of Mindfulness Meditation – Jon Kabat-Zinn**

1. **Non-Judgment: impartial witnessing, observing your evaluations and categorizations**

* Noticing the automatic habit of labelling everything we experience as good, bad, or neutral.
* The habit of judging locks us into mechanical reactions that we are not even aware of and often has little objective basis.
* By becoming aware of your judgments, you can choose actions and behaviours more consciously rather than automatically reacting to situations in your environment.

*This principle will be useful as you start to engage in new mindfulness practices that your mind may judge as boring or a waste of time.*

1. **Patience: allowing things to unfold in their time, bringing patience to ourselves and others**

* This is an understanding that sometimes things must unfold in their own time.
* This principle reminds you to be patient with yourself as your mind is stretched in new ways

*Patience is a helpful quality to invoke when the mind is agitated. To be patient is to be open to each moment as it unfolds knowing that like the butterfly that some things can only unfold in their own time. So, when starting out your mindfulness practice or anything else please stick through whatever takes place trusting that some things will make more sense after you have practiced them for a while.*

1. **Beginner’s Mind: willing to see things as if for the first time.**

* We let our beliefs about a situation prevent us from seeing things as they really are.
* No moment is the same as any other.
* Beginner’s mind allows us to be receptive to new possibilities and prevents us from getting stuck in our mind, which often thinks it knows more than it actually does.

*Try to cultivate your own beginner’s mind as an experiment. The next time you see someone familiar notice if you are seeing the person with fresh eyes or through the lens of your beliefs about that person. If you encounter a new activity you need to do for this course, notice if you are open to trying it out fully or have you already decided before doing it that you don’t like it. When you are out walking, see if you are noticing things you had overlooked before. Developing beginner’s mind opens you to possibilities in life you may be missing out on because you are viewing everything through the lens shaped by past experience that is not aware of what else there is to learn and explore.*

1. **Trust: developing trust in your feelings and yourself is an integral part of the mindfulness practice.**(Your own experience is the truth. Mindfulness is based on your PERSONAL experience and you trust what your senses are telling you).

* The act of trusting yourself and your basic wisdom is an important aspect of the mindfulness training.
* If you are feeling strongly about something it is important to attend to that rather than ignore because an outside authority is telling you to do so.
* Mindfulness is an objective process of inquiry and accepting what people of ‘authority’ tell you without questioning the validity of it for yourself is against the basic premise of mindfulness.
* It is important to stay open and learn from other sources but ultimately you have to live your life and make your choices that feel right to you.

*It is almost easier to trust external authorities to tell us how to live our lives. Mindfulness involves practicing trusting your own feelings and that doesn’t mean you react based upon all your feelings but that you explore any feelings that show up fully to see what they are telling you about a situation and then you trust yourself to come up with the right action.*

1. **Non-striving: non-goal oriented, remaining unattached to outcome or achievement**

* Even though everyone undertaking mindfulness practice has some goals intentions while they are taking their training, at the time of mindfulness practice itself, simply do the practice without any expectations.
* When you set expectations such as feeling more relaxed, you are introducing conditions that don’t allow you to be fully present with what is, because you are trying to change the present to be something else. If you are trying to change the present then you are not being with what is, which is what the mindfulness training is.
* Remember to allow anything and everything that you experience from moment to moment to be there, because it already is. If you are tensed, just pay attention to the tension. If you are criticizing yourself, just observe the activity of the judging mind.

*Non-striving may be the most difficult of all the principles because in our culture we are taught to be goal-oriented and to be constantly doing something in order to reach our goals. In mindfulness you will reach your goals by not trying to change the present but by being present to whatever arises, and in that way, you will find that the goals are ultimately reached. This is perhaps something you will need to experience for yourself to really understand.*

1. **Acceptance: open to seeing and acknowledging things as they are. It does not mean approval or resignation.**

* Acceptance is the willingness to see things as they really are.
* Acceptance does not mean that you have to be satisfied with the way things are or that you don’t do anything to change what you don’t like.
* When you have the ability to see things as they are you free up energy to take the appropriate actions instead of working with a mind that is clouded by denial, prejudices, fears, and self-judgments.

1. **Letting go: non-attachment and the ability to put aside the tendency to elevate some aspects of our experience and to reject others**

* Letting go is a way of letting things be, of accepting things as they are.
* When you observe your mind grasping or pushing away, you can remind yourself to let go of the impulse to grasp or push away and see what happens.
* If you can’t let go, try the opposite, of really holding on and seeing what that feels like. By looking at how you hold on you will learn how to let go.
* Letting go is something you naturally do when you sleep. If you have trouble sleeping, then it could be because you are not able to let go.

(Mindfulness Now, Training Programme 2017 - <http://mindfulnessnow.org.uk/>)