

Initial Problems Practising Mindfulness & Solutions

Many people have great difficulty establishing a regular daily practice. *It is helpful if you:*

Link your practice into your normal daily routine

Make your practice habitual

Usually it is best if a practitioner links the mindfulness practice into their normal daily routine. Most people have a predictable morning routine into which mindfulness can be slotted. The important thing is that the practice should not be based on whether a practitioner feels up to it on a particular day or not. Instead it needs to be established as a good habit which is practiced without internal disputation, much like brushing your teeth.

Consider Use of Ritual to Support the Habit

Setting up a special place for your sitting meditation with articles that help you enter into the practice. Some people find articles like candles and bells conducive. Others react against the stereotype. Find what suits you.

Some people find it helpful to use simple affirmations stating the purpose of your meditation at the beginning and end of a sitting practice. Examples of such affirmations are:

Before Sitting:

May I develop a clear mind, skilful communication and effective action for the benefit of all living beings including myself as a result of this practice.

After Sitting:

May I use my mindfulness to act compassionately and wisely toward all living beings including myself.

Sometimes flexibility and imagination are required to find an appropriate time and place.

People with young children often find it easier to meditate at work in their office. Single parents of preschool children often find it very difficult to find time. Sometimes they can fit it in when the children are napping. Some people meditate on the train on the way to work in the morning.

Westerners, especially therapists, have great difficulty letting go of striving for specific outcomes.

In mindfulness we apply effort to focusing our attention on the breath and then opening to awareness of other mental phenomena. With mindfulness we acknowledge that the effort to "Get somewhere" is often the wrong kind of effort for catalyzing change or growth or healing, coming as it usually does from rejection of a present moment reality without having a full awareness & understanding of that reality.

Let go of expectations and just do it.

When practicing mindfulness, we need to let go the desire for other outcomes, such as getting rid of urges, feeling better, thinking more logically or optimistically. This becomes easier with practice as we naturally begin to trust the method more. In the meantime it helps to read the literature. It also helps to reflect on the inevitability of change and the ultimate impermanence of all phenomena and of all relationships. Contemplation of the Serenity Prayer can also be helpful, in this regard.

Serenity Prayer by theologian Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr

**Grant me the SERENITY to
accept the things I cannot change;
COURAGE to change the things I can;
and WISDOM to know the difference.**

**Taking this difficult world
As it is
Not as I would have it.**

**Living one day at a time
Enjoying one moment at a time
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace**

**And in this way
Opening to Grace
And the Joy and Peace that comes with it**

There are many other sources of helpful reflections one being:

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1994) *Wherever you go, there you are.* New York : Hyperion Press

Other Problems That Can Occur When Teaching Mindfulness to Clients

Therapists who do not have a regular mindfulness practice themselves have a great deal of difficulty successfully teaching it.

This even applies to the teaching of a simple process like urge surfing. Indeed the research shows that therapists need to have their own well established mindfulness practice in order to be effective mindfulness trainers. (Segal et al 2002 pp83-84)

Mindfulness may initially lead to increased awareness of repressed unpleasant feelings such as agitation, grief or boredom.

Louise had been badly sexually abused for years as a young girl. When she initially came to see me she couldn't remember the last time she had cried. Nonetheless, when Louise began doing regular mindfulness meditation she cried for most of the duration of her daily twenty minute sessions.

I encouraged Louise to allow the crying to happen and to be mindful of the changing physical sensations in her body associated with the grief. This is often a workable way to stay mindful in the presence of intense emotion. In this way Louise began her successful recovery from the abuse and the poorly developed self efficacy that went with it.

The client needs some pre-existing strength of personality in order to establish a regular mindfulness practice.

We can see from the above case that some impulse control and distress tolerance are required. It often helps to meditate with the client in therapy sessions. When the therapist can tolerate the client's affect, a message is powerfully communicated that their affect is tolerable. This can lead to the rest of the therapeutic session being more grounded and less scattered. Even if the client does not persist with home practice they often benefit by having experienced decentering and the noticing of the automatic flow of the mind and the continually changing nature of mental phenomena. This can provide the basis for later success in therapy with such things as urge surfing or learning distress tolerance.

Sometimes it is better to begin with simple awareness of body sensations rather than breath focused mindfulness. If it is still too difficult it can be helpful to start with very brief sessions of mindfulness of 5 minutes or less. If even that is too difficult, "mindfulness in action" techniques can be used.