



SESSION 1:

How to look after yourself, so you can look after others



What is Mindfulness?

Our minds are amazing. They help us plan, and manage things and get things done. But we also spend a lot of the time worrying about the future, or feeling sad about the past and not noticing how things are at this very moment.



Mindfulness is the practice of being right here, right now, in this moment and just noticing what is happening, around you and inside you, without judging it or labelling it as good or bad.

*Our definition of mindfulness is: a **state of mind** that allows you to pay attention to the present moment, on purpose, and without judgment.*

Examples of being mindful

You have already experienced many moments of mindfulness in your life, when you were totally present with what was happening at that moment. Examples could be:

- Looking at a beautiful natural landscape, like a sunset or hillside or clouds
- Watching your favorite sports team in the final moments of a close game
- Watching a movie you really enjoy
- Stepping into a shower when you first experience the feeling of the warm water on your body
- Listening to your favorite piece of music and not thinking of anything else

How to “do” mindfulness

It sounds simple doesn't it? Just being here, now. But what happens when you stop what you are doing and just sit to look out the window. Almost always, thoughts pop into your head - what are you cooking for dinner, is your mom doing OK, did you say something you shouldn't have when you spoke to your friend.

Getting distracted from the present moment is normal, and happens to everyone, even people that have been learning mindfulness for years. The real practice in mindfulness is ***noticing that you are distracted, then gently bringing yourself back to the present moment.***

A very useful way to bring yourself back to the present moment is **using your own breath** as an anchor. You are always breathing in and out meaning your breath is there for you to focus on whenever you need it.

Here are a few ways to start.

- Spend a few minutes sitting down and get curious about the breath. How does it feel coming into your body? Can you feel it in your belly? Or around your nose?
- Observe the breath streaming out of your body - what does that feel like?
- What happens in between the in-breath and the out-breath. How long do you pause there? Where is the point where you change from in-breath to out-breath?

You can also focus on other sensations to help bring you back to this present moment, like taking a moment to explore what you can hear around you.

How is mindfulness helpful in caregiving?

Mindfulness has been shown to have lots of benefits, including lowering stress and anxiety, helping with sleep and increasing wellbeing. In other words, mindfulness is a great way to practice **self-care**, because it supports you looking after yourself emotionally and physically.

There are also benefits for using mindfulness when caregiving, that help both you, others around you and the person you are caring for.

- **Mindfulness helps you stay calm.** Being less stressed and more calm can help the person you care for also feel calmer.
- **Mindfulness increases concentration.** If you are more focused you are less likely to make mistakes while caring like forgetting appointments or giving the wrong dose of medication.
- **Mindfulness helps you be more aware of how you are** and when you need support and self-care. By looking after yourself you can continue giving high quality care to the person you care for.
- **Mindfulness makes you more resilient.** When you are resilient you are able to bounce back and recover from difficulties and challenges. Mindfulness helps you manage difficult situations without burning out.

Mindfulness helps build your wellbeing,
so you can better look after your friends and family.

Quick & easy mindfulness activities

Mindfulness doesn't need to take a long time. As a caregiver your life is busy so you can try out these small moments of mindfulness in your day. They shouldn't take more than 1 minute each.

- Set a reminder for a few times a day when you can stop and mindfully take 3 breaths, noticing how they feel in your body.
- Each time you walk into a certain room, pause at the doorway and take a mindful breath.
- Take a minute in the day to close your eyes and listen to everything around you - the sounds, the silence, the hums and the layers of noise.
- When having a drink of water, or cup of coffee, can you focus on the experience and how it tastes, how it smells, how the liquid feels in your mouth and how the cup feels in your hand.
- When standing, bring your attention to your feet and explore the sensation of your feet on the floor.

Homework exercise

During the week, practice being as fully present as you can. Try one of the activities above and observe what happens.

Keep in mind that mindfulness requires no special conditions – it is available in every moment, whenever you want to bring your attention to this present moment.

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