

## WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

*“Paying attention to what is happening in this present moment with openness, curiosity, and flexibility”.*

Learning mindfulness requires practice. It is not a quick, smooth ride to an instant stress free life. As you practice, mindfulness can slowly and steadily soothe your mind and heart, positively nourishing all parts of your life.

Mindful attention is active, purposeful and requires you to make a certain effort. It requires you to use your senses to pay attention to what you can see, smell, taste, touch, hear in your external environment in the present moment. Internally, mindfulness requires you to notice your thoughts and feelings as they are happening, rather than being on autopilot and unconscious of them.

This is what we call moving out of “doing mode” (taking actions, achieving goals) and switching to “being mode” (relaxing, connecting to our senses, managing our emotions). Modern western society doesn’t place much value on present moment living. However, this moving into “being mode” provides an antidote or balance to the busyness of the “doing mode”. Don’t think of “doing” as bad and “being” as good. They both have to be balanced for a full and satisfying life.

The more we are able to move with flexibility from doing to being, the more we are able to respond flexibly to our needs as they arise within us and in interaction with the external world.

If, for instance, I was consciously deciding to plan and choose what to do next month and I know that I’m doing so, that’s mindfulness. If I am consciously choosing to think and reflect on what happened yesterday and I know that I’m thinking about yesterday, that’s mindfulness. Mindful thinking is a conscious, deliberate observation of our internal experience without getting caught up (hooked) by the thought process.

Thoughts will always arise and pass away, just like the sun always rises and sets. We don’t fight with the sunrise or the sunset: We accept that that’s the nature of the sun. In the same way, we don’t need to fight our thoughts. It’s the nature of thoughts to rise and to pass away in our minds. In mindfulness, we learn to step back and watch the thoughts that arise. This allows us to make more conscious choices around the thoughts we pay attention to rather than being on autopilot and automatically believing what our thoughts tell us.

### Why Use Mindfulness

- Mindfulness frees us from rumination and endless doing that can imprison us in unhappiness and stress.
- Mindfulness means that our thoughts are passing mental events, not reality itself and we are more in touch with life through our body and our senses rather than mostly through our unexamined and habitual thoughts.
- Mindfulness offers a set of practical tools, exercises and attitudes to help us connect more fully to our whole experience (internal, external, mind and body). This process provides a realistic appraisal of where we are and what

condition we are in. The more fully we are aware of our situation as it is here and now, the more effectively we can take action to change it.

Gandhi said *“The future depends on what we do in the present moment.”*