



Practical Meditation

For You and Your Workplace

Day 1

What Is Mindfulness?

The practice of mindfulness has become increasingly popular in recent years. But what is it and how can it help us in daily lives? Mindfulness is simple. It's about becoming aware of aspects of our everyday experience with curiosity and openness. It's about dropping into the present moment and being aware of what we're doing it, while we're doing it, rather than allowing ourselves to be pulled into the past or forward into the future by the power of our own thoughts, which can often be disconcerting or anxiety creating. The word mindfulness refers to meditation practices or exercises that simply notice feelings and thoughts as they come and go, without judgement.

When we are mindful, we notice and observe moments, events and situations as they arise – without over analysing them. With practice, mindfulness can help us to create the space we need to respond, rather than knee-jerk react to challenges, whether at home or in the workplace. With mindfulness, we start to see and enjoy the wonders of everyday life, which we can often take for granted.

It might sound surprising, but more often than not, most of us live anywhere but in the present moment. We can all think of times when we have desperately wanted to be immersed in what we're doing – perhaps at a celebration, when helping a colleague, or when playing with a small child. But our minds are often elsewhere, usually dwelling in the past or floating ahead in the future, where regrets, jealousies and/or anxieties may lie.

Using mindfulness gives us a chance to notice life as it happens, with gentle curiosity and kindness to ourselves – so that we don't miss what's actually going on. Being mindful also means being present to *every* moment, not just the pleasant or neutral ones. It's about



Practical Meditation

For You and Your Workplace

befriending difficult emotions too, rather than pushing them away or trying to deny their existence.

How Can We Practice Mindfulness?

There are a number of ways in which we can practice mindfulness, at any time of the day. These include practicing mindfulness meditations and using short mindful pauses, in which we simply bring our awareness to what is happening, right now.

When we practice mindfulness, we bring moment-to-moment awareness to aspects of everyday life, such as the brushing of our teeth, the brewing of tea, the stroking of a cat or the running of a bath. We do this by slowing down and noticing the intricate detail of the moment. We notice any sensations that arise, the temperature of the water, the speed at which the tap flows, the aroma of the tea, the warmth of the cat's fur and the leather of the steering wheel of the car. In this way, we can experience the moment *just as it is*, without wishing it to be different or somehow better.

It's important to remember that practicing mindfulness should not be seen as yet another thing to add to your 'to do' list. Rather it's a different way of being – a way of dropping into the present moment, and reaping the benefits of doing so, whenever you can during the day. The good news is that short bursts of mindfulness practiced regularly are enough to enable us to start reaping the many health benefits it can bring.

What is Mindfulness Meditation?

Mindfulness meditation is a type of meditation, which develops our ability to pay attention to our moment-to-moment experience with acceptance, patience and kindness to ourselves. It helps us to come into the present moment.

Mindfulness meditation invites us to use an anchor to the present moment - such as the breath, sensations that may arise in the body or sounds that surround us. We return to this anchor time and time



Practical Meditation

For You and Your Workplace

again, whenever our mind wanders off into thinking, worrying, regretting or ruminating. Every time the mind wanders in this way, we gently invite it to return to this point of anchor, e.g. the breath. By focusing the mind on our present moment experience, we give it a break from its tendency to worry about the future, live in the past or catastrophise about what could go wrong at any given moment. We then have the opportunity to see how thoughts arise and disappear of their own accord, if we allow them to. This practice helps us to understand that we have a choice about whether or not to act on our thoughts and gives us the space to decide how to respond. It puts us back in the driving seat.

Mindfulness meditation is not complicated, exclusive or long-winded. It can be practiced by anyone. It doesn't require us to stop our thoughts or empty our minds, which is a common misconception. Instead, it's a practice that is centred on *developing* our awareness, and empowers us to let our thoughts pass, rather than latching onto them and allowing them to spiral out of control.

Mindfulness meditation involves a quietening of the mind and a training of our attention to become aware of the present moment. With practice, we can start to gain a better understanding of how our mind works.

How Do I Get Started?

So having established what we mean by mindfulness and meditation, why, when and where should we practice and what equipment do we need?

Why Should I Practice Mindfulness Meditation?

While mindfulness meditation is not a panacea for all ills, there is now a significant body of scientific evidence to support the many benefits that flow from regular practice. These benefits include stress management, reducing anxiety and depression, lowering blood



Practical Meditation

For You and Your Workplace

pressure, improving sleep, increasing our ability to concentrate, feeling happier and experiencing an improved sense of wellbeing.

What Equipment Do I Need to Practice?

The answer is simply your body and your breath. For comfort, you may wish to use a high-backed chair or a cushion on the floor. If you want to lie down, choose somewhere comfortable, again where you won't be disturbed. If you decide to meditate on your bed, simply be aware of the temptation to drift off to sleep. This is a common experience and may simply demonstrate that you need more sleep.

When and Where Should I Meditate?

One of the initial practical difficulties often faced by those starting out, is finding a place to practice where you won't be disturbed, even if it's just for a few minutes. This can be difficult given the demands of both the home and the workplace. When deciding where to meditate, it's often helpful to use the same space each time. This may be the bedroom, the office, the garden shed, or even the car at the start or end of a journey. However, if this is not possible, try to see when you can find just a few moments for yourself to be still and quiet. Less practice, more often, brings the benefits. Finding the time to meditate on a regular basis can however be one of the hardest challenges we face.

In terms of how we should meditate, there is no fixed or best way. We can meditate in lots of different postures – lying down, seated, while walking or seated. It is however important that your posture is comfortable, balanced and open so that you can breathe easily and feel alert, with the hope of falling gently awake.