

# An Introduction to Mindfulness

Mindfulness is both a modern secular approach to life and an ancient contemplative tradition. While the modern secular mindfulness courses draw on the underpinnings of the ancient tradition, it is an empirically researched discipline.

The empirical research base has been growing since the early 1980s across a variety (and ever expanding) number of academic fields. The research has shown that practicing mindfulness can:

- help people manage stress, anxiety and depression;
- help people manage chronic pain;
- improve focus, concentration and creativity;
- improve emotional intelligence;
- enhance communication skills and can make people more empathetic.



## What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is essentially a form of attention training, although the practice is more involved and expansive than simply learning to focus.

It is about training our minds to dwell in the present moment, rather than being drawn away in thinking, analysis, rumination and stress.

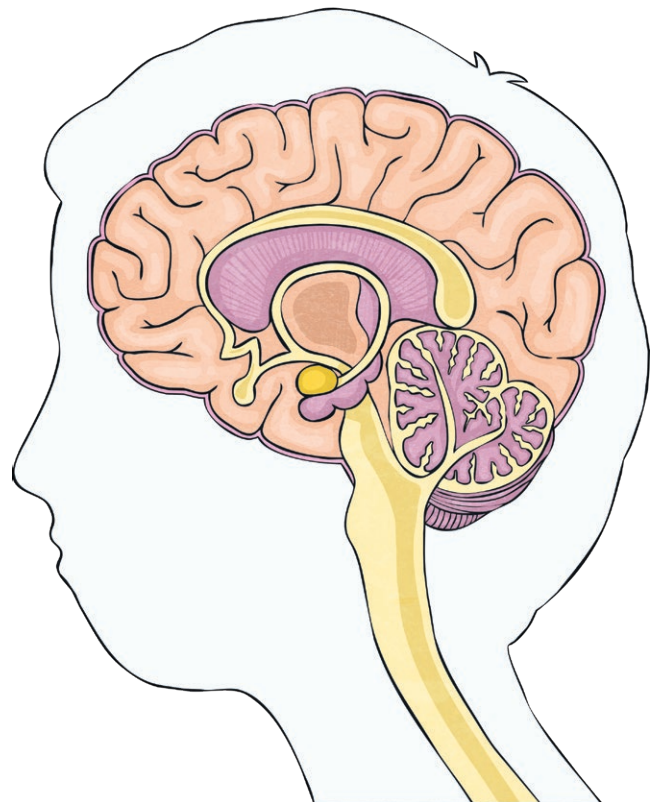
Mindfulness is taught in a variety of contexts and there is an increasing call for it to be taught to children as a way of making them calmer and more able to manage and respond, rather than react, to their experience.

Through mindfulness, we cultivate awareness of our moment-to-moment experience – our thoughts, emotions and physical sensations – and learn to recognise how this helps to shape our mood and behaviour.

Mindfulness teaches us to recognise when we are caught up in our emotions and reactivity and gives us the option of stepping back and choosing how we want to respond.

Mindfulness is a non-judgemental approach to life. It teaches the practitioner to accept all experience, thought and emotion as it arises and look at how these things help shape our mood.

There is no right or wrong in mindfulness. All experience is welcomed.

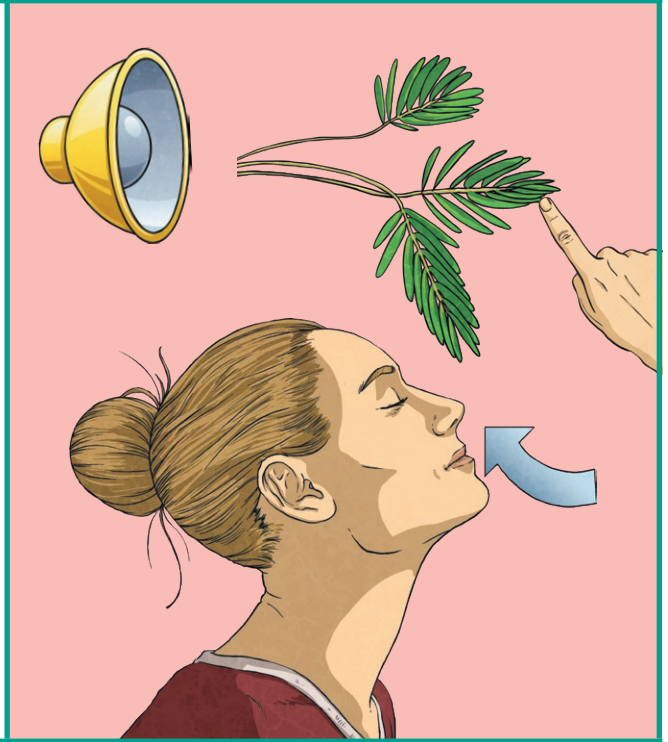


## Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness is an experiential discipline primarily and the majority of the work in mindfulness are the practices themselves. The practices in mindfulness are meditations.

It is important to understand that meditation does not mean clearing the mind, having a different experience or trying to be different than how you already are. Mindfulness meditation practices are simply ways to help focus and settle the mind.

By using mindful 'anchors' - aspects of our present moment experience where we can rest our attention, such as the breath, physical sensations and sounds - practitioners can train themselves to be focused on present moment experience and to notice when the mind wanders.



## Teaching Essentials

- Mindfulness is non-judgemental. There is no right or wrong experience. We are aiming to be open and accepting of all experiences.
- The mind will wander during the practices. This is not a sign of failing at meditation, it is in fact impossible to fail at meditation or do badly. A wandering mind is welcomed because being able to recognise that the mind has wandered is a sign that we are mindful of our habitual patterns.
- Mindfulness meditation is not about making the mind go blank! Thoughts come and go. We learn to recognise them as mental events and learn not to get drawn into thought and rumination.
- Mindfulness is not about relaxation but about being aware and focused on all experience; about noting our habitual responses and reactions and choosing to step back from them.
- Mindfulness is a fun practice. It is about recognising our habitual patterns and learning that we can let go of them. At its heart, it is a practice rooted in acts of kindness and compassion towards ourselves. These simple practices are not about getting it right but about supporting ourselves in a way that can allow us to be content and to flourish.

