

Mindfulness: Why Bother?

Being mindful can . . .

1. Give you more choices and more control over your behavior. It helps you slow down and notice emotions, thoughts, and urges (i.e., increases self-awareness), and helps you choose a behavior more thoughtfully, rather than act impulsively and make situations worse.
2. Reduce your emotional suffering and increase your pleasure and sense of well-being.
3. Help you make important decisions (and balance overly emotional or overly logical decisions).
4. Help focus your attention (i.e., be in control of your mind rather than letting your mind be in control of you) and therefore make you more effective and productive.
5. Increase compassion for self and others.
6. Lessen your pain, tension, and stress, and in turn can even improve your health.

Practice, practice, practice

From *DBT Skills Manual for Adolescents*, by Jill H. Rathus and Alec L. Miller. Copyright 2015 by The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this handout is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use only (see copyright page for details). Purchasers can download and print additional copies of this handout from www.guilford.com/rathus-handouts.

Mindfulness Cheat Sheet

1. Identify what you will focus on:

Examples: Your breath

An object (a picture, burning candle)

An activity (brushing your hair, cleaning your room, reading)

2. Bring your attention to the object of focus.

3. When your attention wanders away from the object of focus (and sometimes it will, so don't judge yourself for it!) . . .

- Notice that this has happened.
- Gently bring your attention back to the object of focus.



To Get Started

Begin practicing mindfulness by noticing your attention and how it wanders. Gradually work on doing this practice for 30 seconds, 1 minute and 2 minutes at a time. Practice *a lot*. No one will know you are doing it!

Your attention may wander to noises around you, worry thoughts, judgmental thoughts such as “this is stupid,” body sensations, urges to talk, and so on). Notice them, let them go, and return your attention to the object of focus.

ORIENTATION HANDOUT 4
Biosocial Theory


BIO:

A. There is a biological vulnerability to emotions

1. high sensitivity
2. high reactivity
3. slow return to baseline

plus


B. An inability to effectively regulate emotions.



TRANSACTIONING ↓ ↑ WITH . . .

SOCIAL:

An invalidating environment communicates that what you are feeling, thinking, or doing doesn't make sense or is considered inaccurate or an overreaction. Environments include parents, teachers, peers, therapists, coaches, and others. Sometimes there is a "poor fit" (e.g., temperament) between the person and the environment.



The invalidating environment punishes or sometimes reinforces emotional displays and contributes to the person's suppression or escalation of emotions, and sometimes leaves the person feeling confused and unable to trust one's own emotional experiences (**self-invalidation**).

OVER TIME LEADS TO . . .



**Multiple Problems
(Chronic Emotional Dysregulation)**

From *DBT Skills Manual for Adolescents*, by Jill H. Rathus and Alec L. Miller. Copyright 2015 by The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this handout is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use only (see copyright page for details). Purchasers can download and print additional copies of this handout from www.guilford.com/rathus-handouts.

I AM AWARE OF Exercise

(Written by Erin Cox-Slosberg, MSW)

What is “I am aware of...”

“I am aware of.” is a mindfulness tool used in DBT to help our clients increase their knowledge and understanding of their experience of being in the moment. In this practice we use short, identifying sentences to describe thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. We encourage clients to not get caught up in thinking about why they are experiencing certain things, and to focus instead on their awareness of what is occurring in that particular moment and time. We start with “I” to acknowledge it is our own experience. We then state “am aware of” so that we are practicing using the skill of Observation during the exercise.

The idea behind this exercise is that when we become more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, we then have the option to apply skills instead of reacting impulsively to uncomfortable experiences. For example, a person may identify anxiety as a feeling, and notice the body sensations of racing thoughts, fast heart beat, and a flushed face. They can then choose to use the TIPP skill, where they can apply a cool cloth to their face in order to decrease their body temperature, and thereby potentially decrease the intensity of the anxiety .

The mind and body are important communicators, and “I am aware of “ allows us to get good at understanding what message each area of awareness (emotion, thought, physical sensation) may be sending. Through practice, and by observing these messages, we develop the ability to respond to these areas of awareness skillfully rather than react to them impulsively.

The “I am aware of exercise” can be used at any moment and time, and we encourage clients to use it throughout the day.

When to use this exercise with a client:

As a clinician, times I use “ I am aware of...”

After mindfulness practice

When a client is emotionally dysregulated or experiencing distress

When a client is numb or can't identify what they are experiencing

When a client is exposing themselves to a particular emotion

Script for I Am Aware Of:

Thank you for your participation in that mindfulness practice. Now I'm going to have everyone practice this exercise called "I am aware of". We will do this in group after every mindfulness practice and I would encourage this to be part of your daily routine! Check in a few times a day with yourself. We are going to look at three things. Picture a triangle. I usually hold up a blank piece of paper with a triangle on it; at one corner it says thoughts, another feelings, and the last physical sensations. Let's take a minute to think about these three things.

I state.. "we are not going to get caught up in the content about why we are feeling a certain way or why we are having these thoughts, we are working on just the awareness and being present in this very moment, right here and now. "

For the first introduction to this I start with me. "I am aware of forward thinking (there is backwards and popcorn thinking for a framework), my feet on the floor, a fluttery feeling in my stomach, and the sun on my face".

I now have my co-leader participate.

Next, I ask a group member to give it a try, shaping the responses. I dig deep, for example if someone says "I'm tired." I might then say " where do you feel that? Is that a thought or do you physically feel it in your body, the tiredness, and if so how and where?" If they state they stayed up too late gaming with friends, I might say "so that would fit into backwards thinking as you are thinking about something that has happened in the past but is effecting your present state."

I would then thank them and summarize, " so you are aware of backwards thinking, tired heavy eyes and body, etc".

All members take a turn sharing what they are aware of. It should not take more than 30 seconds to a minute for each person. After all members have shared, I explain why we do this.

I typically say.. "It gives us an opportunity when we are aware of our thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations to be in wise mind and to use skills when we want to change something."

Examples:

Anxiety- I ask the group as a whole to give me some physical sensations associated with that emotion. Then I ask them for some thought examples associated with that emotion (worry thoughts, forward thinking about a test) and I point out skills they may or may not know yet that they might be able to use to reduce, change, or slightly lessen what they might be experiencing. For example, applying a cold compress when feeling flushed may change the trajectory of anxiety. Changing a thought by reading a self-affirming statement may also change the intensity level of the anxiety. Reducing muscle tension with a progressive relaxation also might decrease the intensity of anxiety. I finish by saying that by checking in with yourself, and looking at these three levels of awareness, you can make one small change in the triangle, or possibly insert a skill to break the circuit. This may alleviate some suffering, build mastery, and help to move forward in that moment.

When and if someone states “I don’t know or I don’t feel anything”, I have them start with something such as lifting their feet up and putting them back on the floor, or rubbing their hands together to create warmth, tapping the top of their hand, etc.. I bet you all have great ideas for this:)

One last thought: the awareness can also potentially prolong or help maintain an emotional state such as centered, calm, focused, etc. You can use this with clients to help them extend positive emotions too!

