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Penelope specialises in mindfulness based cognitive therapy as well as mindfulness therapy. Here she creates a mindful presence when working with her clients allowing for the best opportunities to make deep long-term changes.

She has a mature sense of compassion and understanding of what it means to be human and live in the world we do; an exceptional ability to assess and define clinical problems and the expertise to know which treatment strategy is best suited for each client and finally, the tenacity to challenge problematic behavioural patterns whilst maintaining a sense of empathy.

This document has been prepared to assist you with further knowledge on mindfulness.





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Mindfulness

What is this thing called mindfulness?

It is the art of being mindful or aware.

The question arises - aware of what?

Aware of whatever is happening right here, right now.

Most people have heard of living in the moment or being in the present? Have you been told not to dwell on the past or live in / worry about the future? Relax and just go with the flow seems to be a popular cliché these days.

This advice sounds great but how to go about actually living in the moment or going with the flow? I hear from clients and friends:

"I can be in the moment for a few seconds but then I forget and I'm back lost in the past or reflecting on the future."

I'm happy to say that there is a way of working towards being in the present more and therefore reaping the rewards of living in the moment. That way is with mindfulness.

One definition of mindfulness I've come across is from the book "The Mindful Way through Depression" by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007). They write, "Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally to things as they are." page. 47.

Mindfulness, therefore, is the practice of being mindful or being aware of whatever is happening now and not wanting it to be different in any way; there is an acceptance of what is there. It's important to point out that accepting the situation doesn't mean resignation or approval because this would be too passive and could make you feel helpless. When you have acceptance as compared to rejection or denial, you become free to work positively and constructively towards a resolution without feeling resentful or sorry for yourself.

When you are mindful, there is a strong sense of feeling alive. You develop a sensitivity to what is actually happening before you rather than creating a story about what's happening or what you would like to have happen. You notice the finer details of life more.

Most of the time we live our lives in what's called automatic pilot where we are pretty much unaware of ourselves and our surroundings. In this state, we have little control over what we attend to, and we therefore allow our attention or focus to be taken to whatever the mind finds interesting in either a positive or negative way.



In this state, we are lost in our mind activity, that is, our thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, judgements and beliefs. For the most part of our daily existence, we believe what our mind is telling us not what is actually occurring. In this way, we treat our thoughts as facts as the real thing whereas thinking is a story about the real thing, an interpretation.

Over time, as you practice mindfulness you'll develop the ability to see this; to see that the activity of the mind with its thoughts, attitudes, judgements, perceptions and beliefs are not reality and that you have a choice about what you pay attention to. With this, you'll find yourself less likely to be dragged involuntarily to wherever or whatever the mind wants you to focus on thereby, you can start to actively influence what you feel and what you do. New ways of interacting with the world will then present themselves to you because you will no longer be locked into the habitual ways you usually do things.

Mindfulness and its Advantages

To become a mindful person requires patience, time, trust, energy, commitment and persistence. If you haven't hit the "close page" icon because it all sounds too hard, there are so many benefits. In short, as your mindfulness becomes more intense and deeper, you can cope with a lot more of what life throws at you, and your ability to handle your problems improves. If you stay being controlled by the mind and therefore not mindful, personal suffering is more likely to continue.

Keeping this in mind, here are some of the likely benefits of practicing mindfulness:

A greater sense of calm and relaxedness.

An increased ability for compassion and understanding.

A sense of contentment.

Reduction in levels of anxiety with significant improvements in anxiety disorders including panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder and phobias.

Positive changes in troublesome addictive behaviours.

Better control over habits.

Less emotional turmoil, namely, unhealthy highs and lows with associated changes in psychological issues like depression, bipolar disorder and chronic unhappiness, grief and mid life angst.

A deeper knowing, understanding and acceptance of who you are as well as of others.



Enhanced relationships.

Improvements in particular physical complaints including stress, chronic pain, headaches, hypertension.

Improved motivation and;

Spiritual enhancement.

Is Mindfulness Appropriate For Me?

Here are some guidelines to assist you in deciding whether mindfulness would be appropriate and beneficial for you or a friend or loved one. If you find you are agreeing with some or quite a few of them then mindfulness could be the way to go.

I would like to live more in the present moment but I don't know how to go about doing that.

I've tried other forms of therapy or counselling and didn't find they were effective for me.

My doctor has suggested I see a psychologist because I'm experiencing emotional difficulties.

I don't know what to do with myself I'm overwhelmed by emotion.

When I'm feeling emotional I hold it all in and/or distract myself with alcohol, work, shopping etc.

I blame other people for my problems.

I know my thoughts are negative and unrealistic but I don't know how to change them.

I don't want my life as it is now to be "as good as it gets".

I have a sense of the years rushing by and not making the most of the time.

I know there's more to life than I'm experiencing.

Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness activities, of which there are many, have been primarily designed to gradually sharpen your five senses, that is, sight, hearing, touch (sensation), taste and smell, thereby, heightening our sense of awareness of the world around us. As you practice the mindfulness



activities, your ability to perceive what is before you becomes more finely tuned and so you are less likely to focus and dwell on what you think is there or would like to be there.

Each activity allows you to bring something that is not in focus into focus or something you're not aware of into awareness or something that is in the background into the foreground. This is done on purpose, deliberately using each of your five senses at first and then a combination of senses the more experienced you become.

Here are some examples, which are briefly described:

Mindfulness of thoughts. This involves watching or observing the passing flow of your thoughts without becoming lost in the meaning of the thoughts; without becoming engaged in them in any way. Imagining they are like clouds drifting in and out of your head or that they are words on a movie screen that you are observing from a distance. Alternatively, naming the thought as a thought and seeing what happens to it. This activity can be used on its own. Mindfulness of thoughts is also essential when practicing any of the other activities because it is the activity of the mind that takes you away from being mindful of your chosen focus.

Mindfulness of the breath. This is the most widely used mindfulness activity and involves feeling the ebb and flow of the breath, that is, focusing on the sensations as you breathe in and then out or the gaps between each breath.

The Body Scan where you gradually focus on each part of the body in turn, paying close attention to the sensations experienced. For those body areas where it's difficult to perceive physical feelings, deliberately tensing or wriggling those parts can help. This activity can be most useful for those of you who are learning to manage chronic pain or stress-related aches and pains.

Mindfulness of sounds allows you to tune into each sound in the myriad of sounds we aren't ordinarily aware of. Then you can listen to one sound then another. Over time, silence can become a sound and what a beautiful sound it is.

Mindfulness of sight invites attention to the colours, texture, definition and placement in space of objects.

Mindfulness of touch involves the actual feeling sensations of objects by exploring the nuances of touch; what they feel like as opposed to what you think they feel like.

Mindfulness of emotions. Being mindful of emotions allows you to pay attention to a particular feeling you're experiencing, even if it is very distressing, without being overwhelmed or consumed by its emotional charge. This is referred to as the being mode. Mindfulness of emotions involves focusing on the physical sensations of the emotion as they are in the body. When you experience an emotion various muscles, the skin and internal organs of the body respond in different ways depending on the emotion felt. Attending to these physical changes in



the body, just observing them curiously and allowing them to be there may give you the best possible way of resolving emotions.

Mindfulness of an activity, e.g. walking, washing dishes, eating or drinking. Mindful walking involves paying close attention to each step that's made along the way, not the destination. With mindful eating, each mouthful has the potential of being an explosion of the taste, sight, smell and physical sensation.

Mindfulness can be carried out in two ways: in a structured way and an unstructured one. Firstly, setting aside time each day to practice one of the mindfulness activities and secondly, pausing briefly throughout the day to be mindful of say a few breaths, or the sensations in your shoulders, or the sounds around you and then continuing with your day.

The Practice of Mindfulness

It seems that mindfulness is one of the latest techniques that health care professionals want to add to their range of therapeutic skills. There have been many others over the years many of which have not stood the test of time. Mindfulness is different in that it has already stood the test of time. It has been around for thousands of years originating in the spiritual traditions of Asia and is now being used increasingly in our Western therapeutic practices.

Mindfulness can be taught reasonably easily to professionals and clients alike as a coping skill similar to relaxation or meditation. It has also been combined with other therapeutic techniques, namely cognitive-based ones, to address particular psychological concerns, and seminars teaching this are increasing in popularity. From my point of view, this is fantastic because it will ultimately mean that more and more people will benefit from mindfulness.

Those experienced professionals who have been practicing mindfulness for many years and who live their life in mindfulness as well as creating a mindful presence when consulting with their clients are called mindfulness practitioners. I am a Mindfulness Practitioner and therefore, I'm in a state of mindfulness throughout the therapeutic session allowing both maximum attention and focus.

I have been formally practicing mindfulness for over 15 years now and have worked intensively with a mindfulness therapist and teacher during this time. This very wise man, who is approaching his 75th year with over 40 years experience as a mindfulness practitioner, has held my hand and challenged me as I've traveled the path towards self-understanding and acceptance.

Interestingly, I had my first experience of mindfulness when I was 11 years old. During a visit to the local pool I had this sense of looking at myself and my friend and knowing that there was a part of me that could observe myself talking with my friend; somewhat like looking at myself on a projector screen. I was aware of not thinking at the time as if my mind had stopped and I



recall feeling very peaceful, safe and secure-like coming back home. I had this sense that I was experiencing something very special that was coming from within me. In that moment, I wasn't influenced by what I wanted the situation to be, that is, I wasn't creating a story. Rather I was in the moment accepting of what was.

For those wishing to explore spiritual enhancement, Penelope can offer a safe, nurturing place for this. She is well versed in the experience of living a spiritual life and supports others on their own personal journey. Penelope draws upon the work of several spiritual teachers including Eckhart Tolle, Osho and Byron Katie.

Mindfulness and Therapy

I would like to talk about two therapeutic techniques that use mindfulness as a treatment tool and that is, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy and Mindfulness Therapy.

Mindfulness Therapy:

In brief, mindfulness therapy involves the use of mindfulness and other activities to bring the therapist and client into what has been referred to as the being mode where one is attending to what is there, that is, the focus is on how things actually are in the moment as well as bringing a sense of acceptance to what is there without any judgement. In this way, the client and therapist engage in the present moment of the therapeutic process. The therapist actively responds to the clients' feelings by observing them versus trying to fix or change them.

This enhanced, accepting presence or being mode enables the therapist to really attend and listen to the client. The element of acceptance in the process means that the therapist, in tuning into what the client presents mindfully, is not judging the therapeutic content against a pre-determined notion of how both the structure and outcome of the session should be. This process relies extensively on the therapists' capacity for mindfulness whilst engaged in the therapeutic process.

The benefits of this therapeutic style is that it can allow the therapist to perceive the client and their issues in a much broader, deeper and more intense way than with other more Western psychological approaches.

In the Western therapeutic approach, the therapist is primarily thinking about what the client is expressing and defining hypotheses about their issues and possible inroads towards resolution, thereby distracting themselves from what is happening for the client right there right now. These therapeutic strategies can also reinforce what has been called the doing mode that clients use to try and solve their problems. The doing mode, in part, is when clients keep asking themselves questions to try and sort out what's wrong with them and/or their life situation because it doesn't match how they think things should be. With this, there is a sense of



judgement about themselves and their life and they run the risk of cementing both long-standing negative patterns of thinking and self-beliefs leaving them open to emotional turmoil.

Mindfulness therapy provides an alternative paradigm by allowing the client and therapist to be in the being mode. With the being mode, clients and the therapist are accepting what is happening for the client. They can then explore the relationship between the clients' moment by moment feeling states and their unresolved emotions or the pain body without a further deterioration of their emotional state as can occur in the doing mode. This is because their awareness of the underlying triggers that link past difficulties and traumas with the present day events and fluctuations in emotional states and moods becomes finely tuned, thereby, avoiding the automatic expression of their pain body.

Over time, the being mode allows for a better understanding of what is real and what is created by the mind. With this, a constructive resolution process can be navigated because the client has a better grasp of how their present sense of inadequacy, resentment, unloveability or hopelessness is a manifestation of the past; an unnecessary story created by the mind wanting to hold onto the familiar past and not about what is realistically happening now.

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy

The second therapeutic process that incorporates mindfulness is MBCT. As the name suggests, this is a combination of cognitive therapy and mindfulness and is a relatively new technique. Initial research into the effectiveness of MBCT has been most encouraging. This is not surprising because the combination of a process that addresses thoughts and one that focuses on being in the present and effectively managing emotions sounds great.

As discussed previously, a client's emotional state and moods can trigger negative thinking making the mood or emotional state a whole lot worse. During the course of each day we experience a range of emotions some are on the positive end of the emotional continuum and others are on the negative. Some mild, some moderate some strong and the rest intense.

This interplay of emotions is what makes us human, they are essential to the essence and quality of our lives. For those of us who allow our emotions to come and go accepting their need to be there, not making them mean anything else than they being an emotion there in that moment, something about what is happening now, we can cope well with them without falling apart.

For those individuals, mentioned previously, where they are prone to depression, anxiety or low self-esteem, for instance, the ordinary, day to day upsets, disappointments and life issues become the impetus for a barrage of negative self-talk that then lead to feeling depressed, anxious and self-defeated. It's like they can't tolerate their feelings; their feelings become an enemy like an external threat based on fear.



This is where the Western therapeutic technique CBT is not sufficient in that CBT alone does not adequately address what one does with changes in mood except to challenge the thoughts that arise. Although challenging is effective on some levels, the client is still left with aspects of the emotional charge and the effects of the pain body. Also, these subtle changes in mood can often go undetected by the person experiencing them due to their automatic nature making challenging difficult.

So, with MBCT clients are instructed in mindfulness so as to allow them to move into the being mode. This then means they are able to step back and observe their emotions rather than being lost in the doing mode trying to think their way out of how they are feeling and what they or someone else should do about it, just making the situation a whole lot worse.

Clients are also taught the various skills of cognitive behavioral therapy enabling them to challenge the barrage of negative thoughts that underpin their emotional concerns. Initial research on these new treatments for emotional concerns are showing some very promising indications that they could provide clients with the necessary life and coping skills to make life-long changes.

Byron Katie

I would like to introduce the work of Byron Katie at this time because I draw extensively from her ideas in my work with clients. After a profoundly tragic phase in her life, Byron Katie realised deeply (not just intellectually) that the only time we struggle in life, that is, when we think we have a problem, is when "we have a thought that argues with reality." In other words, if we both identify with and automatically believe those thoughts and beliefs that are not true/real then we will experience emotional struggle and personal issues.

Now this is not new, in that these ideas are similar to the theory behind Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. This also relates to the essence of mindfulness. What Byron Katie offers though is an amazing process called The Work, which is different from other approaches.

The Work involves practical, interesting, and non-clinical strategies. These life-changing tools allow for changes where relapse is significantly less likely. Most importantly, clients seem to be highly motivated to do The Work. I have been using The Work in my work with clients for a while now and have found that it compliments the other therapeutic strategies I use very well.

Byron Katie's web site www.thework.com may seem somewhat commercial for some of you or may not be to your taste. If so, I invite you to look beyond your first impressions and judgements because this is the whole point of The Work - to look beyond what you think you're seeing or what you think is happening. If you can do this, you have opened yourself to the strong possibility of learning some valuable things about yourself, your relationships and other stuff as well.



Mindfulness. The Doing and Being Mode and The Pain Body

There are two fundamental ways of relating to ourselves and the world around us and they are, the doing mode and the being mode.

The Doing Mode

The doing mode by definition is about wanting a situation to be different from what it is; to change what is occurring in each moment. We do this by creating stories about what is happening in each moment or what we want to have happen. It's also about judging ourselves against an idealized standard of how we and our lives should be, namely, happy, peaceful and contented. The doing mode manifests itself in constant questioning and/or analysis of ourselves and our life situations.

In the doing mode, we are lost in the barrage of thoughts, which make up the core of our mind activity. As Iris Murdoch writes, "our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied veil which partially conceals the world". We become trapped in our mind activity losing our connection to what is actually happening. In other words, the mind creates a story about what's happening rather than allowing us to see what is there. These stories can very quickly become what we think is our reality and we lose our connection with both what is real and the world around us.

To explain in more detail, given that most of us experience a range of emotions and moods during the day, we aren't in states of happiness or peace all the time. So, to focus on the difference between how we feel and what we'd like to feel can leave us with a sense of inadequacy and unhappiness. We end up feeling worse than we did in the first place.

For those of us who are prone to or are experiencing depression, anxiety and self-esteem issues, the situation is even more dire and complex. These individuals are feeling down or in a bad mood all the time and so to compare how they feel with how they'd like to feel means they are in a state of loneliness, despair and hopelessness most if not all of the time.

Furthermore, negative changes in their emotional state or the downward spiral into "a mood" can activate certain thoughts, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that are associated with memories of times when they experienced this state or mood before. In other words, the down mood triggers negative and irrational thinking. So, if a down mood reminds them of times in the past when they've felt loss, failure or rejection, a negative mental dialogue will happen automatically and they'll feel a sense of rejection or loss with the change in mood as if it's all happening over again, for example, "Oh no, here we go again", "Why does this always happen to me"?, "It's not fair". That is, their unresolved emotions become activated.

In this way, they get lost in a negative spiral downwards asking themselves more and more questions, thereby, reinforcing how inadequate, unworthy, unloveable or unsuccessful they feel



they are. They are unable to see that the doing mode they're in is actually feeding the negativity and emotional turmoil rather than helping them be happier, more peaceful and contented.

Pain Body

Eckhart Tolle refers to these unresolved emotions from the past as the pain body. So, the rejection, loss or failure that is felt at the times described above are the pain body. The pain body is all the feelings we haven't dealt with or let go of. As Eckhart Tolle has described in the groundbreaking book *The Power of Now*, the pain body is "the living past in you" and when we identify with it we define ourselves by it; our self-identity becomes our unresolved emotional past.

He also explains how there is an unconscious fear of losing our sense of identity and we, therefore, remain in the pain body because we don't want to lose our sense of self even if it is an unhappy and unsuccessful one. Sounds unusual but it is true. Take a few moments to reflect on how you recreate the past and how you hold onto the familiar and known because it's safe and comfortable. You know what to do in the familiar. There is no need for the energy, which you think you don't have, to courageously step out into something new.

The Being Mode

Whenever I write about the being mode after describing the doing mode I feel a sense of relief because the being mode is about being and accepting. When we are in this mode there is no need to create stories about what is happening because we are tuned into and focused on what is there. Therefore, the being mode is another way of describing mindfulness, when we are practicing mindfulness we are in the being mode. There are a range of mindfulness activities designed to bring you back to the present, accepting what is there.

During those times when we are in the being mode, we are acknowledging and accepting what is happening for us in the situation we're in. That includes, what we're feeling, how we are acting, what's happening in our bodies and the circumstances of the situation. Our sense that we want things to be different has been put on the backburner for a while. It needs to be pointed out, as I have done previously, that this acceptance is not resignation or approval because that could set up feelings of helplessness and possible anger and resentment.

When we are in the being mode, we then open ourselves to the possibility of change. As Tara Brach describes in *Radical Acceptance* "By accepting things rather than denying or reacting to suffering, yours or others, you are then free to work constructively without bitterness or self-pity."

The art of the being mode, which is about fostering mindfulness requires practice, patience, courage and trust, rare commodities in our fast-paced, commercial, materialistic and fear-



driven world. It is important, however, that we as individuals work towards understanding what mindfulness is about and ever so slowly introducing it to ourselves and our lives.

It's important because there's no doubt that when we live our lives in the doing mode, which we do most if not all of the time, we find our search for happiness, peace and contentment oh so elusive. This, in turn, compromises our emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well-being, which ultimately influences how we relate to ourselves and those around us. If you would like to do more reading on this concept then Eckhart Tolle's latest book *The New Earth* would be a fantastic choice.

Encouraging ourselves to become more mindful, therefore, embracing the being mode in our daily lives allows us the opportunity to dwell in the realm of acceptance and as Tara Brach writes in *Radical Acceptance* "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself, then I can change..."

I have included a list of useful resources that discuss different aspects of mindfulness. I would like to acknowledge each of these publications as being an integral part of my own personal journey with mindfulness. As a consequence, I have drawn upon the ideas and wisdom contained in the pages (as well as my own experiences) to prepare these web pages.

It might be that you also find these publications useful as both an introduction to and as an invaluable support as you travel along the mindfulness path

As a way of summarizing these two modes of relating to ourselves and the world, here is a delightful passage from Herman Hesse's book *Siddhartha*:

"When someone is seeking, said Siddhartha, it happens quite easily that he only sees the thing that he is seeking; that he is unable to find anything, unable to absorb anything, because he is only thinking of the thing he is seeking, because he has a goal, because he is obsessed with his goal; but being means: to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal."

Useful Resources

Siddhartha by Herman Hesse, Picador, 1922.

The Book of Secrets: The Science of Meditation by Osho, St. Martin Griffin, 1974.

The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh, Beacon Press. 1975.

A Path with Heart by Jack Kornfield, Bantam, 1993.

Wherever You Go There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zin, Piatkus, 1994.



Full Catastrophic Living by Jon Kabat-Zin, Delta, 1996.

The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle, Hodder, 1999.

Practicing the Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle, Hodder 2000.

The New Earth by Eckhart Tolle, Hodder 2005.

Loving What Is by Byron Katie, Rider, 2002.

The Invitation by Oriah Mountain Dreaming, Harper, 1999.

Radical Acceptance by Tara Brach, Bantam, 2003.

The Mindful Way Through Depression by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal and Jon Kabat-Zinn, The Guildford Press, 2007.