

MINDFULNESS IN A STUDENT'S LIFE

Have you ever:

Sat in a lecture hall and drifted off into some fantasy about what you hope to do on the weekend?

Stared at the title of your next assignment thinking "this is too hard" and you get lost in discouraging thoughts about your ability?

Sat opposite a friend, nodding your head to indicate that you are listening, but really your mind is elsewhere.

Sound familiar? What difference do you think it would make if you were focussed in the above three scenarios? Rather than drifting away from the present, that you were keeping your mind 'on the job'?

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment in a calm and non judgmental way. When we are mindful we are not caught up in what has happened in the past or worrying about the future. We are present-centred, moment by moment. When we are in this mode we have a rich capacity to take in what is happening through all our senses. So just imagine how much more potent and effective you are when you are mindfully listening to your lecturer, focusing on your assignment and listening to your friend.

Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has a direct benefit to helping you let go of unhelpful thinking patterns that impact on your self-esteem (your feelings of self-worth) and your self-confidence (feelings about your ability to do something). It helps you to clear your mind so can get on with what you want to do. Even when you are experiencing a difficult emotion, mindfulness helps you to BE with that emotion in a compassionate and non judgmental way, rather than fighting it. Mindfulness helps you to deal with your thoughts and experiences so they don't deplete you, depress you or de-motivate you.

Mindfulness Exercise:

Just sit and be still. What are you aware of right now?...gently bring your attention to the sensation of your breath..notice the sensation of breathing in and then breathing out...and now observe what happens.. Let your mind drift to whatever comes into your consciousness. Are you aware of sounds around you? Just notice each sound and then let it go...don't evaluate it in anyway...just notice and let it go...or perhaps you notice the silence...are you aware of any physical sensations?..... maybe you notice something unpleasant, like some muscle tension or a difficult feeling...notice if you judge this in some way...just notice and be aware...you can also label what you notice..."that's a sad feeling" or "that's tightness in my shoulders", "that's a judgment". Notice, ..label...and let it go..if you notice that you keep getting caught up with your thoughts...gently come back to your breath, focusing on the sensation of your breath, breathing in and breathing out...continue to do this for a few minutes.

How did you go? If this is your first attempt at mindfulness don't be discouraged if you found yourself feeling distracted. Mindfulness is deceptively simple, but it takes practice to let go and come back to the present.

Try to think of thoughts as clouds moving across the sky or cars passing down the road. They don't have to stay in one place, that is your mind, they can move on. They come and they go. Even if your thoughts seem 'stubborn' sometimes, mindfulness can help you turn down the volume of your thoughts as if you have a dial on your radio or ipod, so they are not so loud in your head.

Here are some other ways to practice mindfulness:

Mindfully eat a meal. Don't have the TV or radio on or read the newspaper. Carefully pay attention to your food on your plate. Notice the colours, the smells...notice how you cut the food and then notice the sensation of taking the food to your mouth.. notice the sensations of chewing your food and the sensation of swallowing. You may only be able to do this for a few moments before you become distracted...that's OK...a key principle in mindfulness is being non-judgmental...so let go of any thoughts of evaluation.

Mindfully have your shower - be aware of the water as it streams down on your skin, the slippery feel of the soap as it moves over your body, the texture of the towel as you dry your body.

Mindfully do a chore like the washing up or mowing the lawn.

We can practice mindfulness in our everyday life and I would encourage you to do this. Start with a few minutes a day. Choose your own time to be mindful. There is also a well-known practice that can help 'train' your mind to become more mindful. This practice is meditation - where you sit quietly for 20-30 minutes, gently observing one 'object of attention' such as your breath or a word or phrase, called a mantra. During the meditation also practice being non-judgmental and gently letting go of thoughts, sounds and other distractions. There is further information on meditation on another Tip Sheet in this series titled: Unwind with Meditation and Relaxation . Ideally, this tip sheet needs to be used alongside additional instruction and/or resources such as the relaxation or mindfulness audio "tools" at "thedesk" which is a free online resource which aims to support Australian tertiary students to achieve mental and physical health and wellbeing.

www.thedesk.org.au

For further free information or support contact UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services (CAPS):

Phone: 02 6773 2897 for an appointment

Email: studentcounselling@une.edu.au or via [AskUNE](#)

<http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling>

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