
S2C8. The third pillar - Mindfulness

When you hear the word mindfulness, what image do you see in your mind? Most people when they hear the word visualize the Buddha sitting in a lotus position with his eyes closed, and some oriental pipe-music (generally a flute) playing in the background. They also believe that practicing mindfulness means focusing on their breathing. Do you believe that too? If you do, you are both right and wrong. Mindfulness is a grossly misunderstood concept, not unlike many other concepts in psychology. This chapter is not sufficient to cover everything there is to know about mindfulness, so, I am going to try to crunch the information for you in a more digestible package.

Simply put, mindfulness is focusing your attention in a non-judgmental or accepting way on the experience occurring in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It is an awareness of the present moment experience with acceptance (Germer et al., 2005). Mindfulness is the state of being able to focus on the task at hand with attention and awareness, without letting other factors cause a distraction i.e., present moment awareness (Behan, 2020). This is to be achieved non-judgmentally, non-critically. Let me explain the individual components.

First, mindfulness is about being in the present moment - having present-moment awareness. Where does your mind reside? In the past, regretting mistakes, feeling guilty, longing for things that are over? Or, does it reside in the future, worrying about things that have not happened yet and may never happen? Or does your mind truly reside in the present, focusing only on the current task with complete dedication? If your mind resides anywhere but in the present moment, and you do not recognize it enough to bring it back to the present, you are not being mindful.

The second component is to stay in the present moment non-judgmentally. Being non-judgmental means not assigning a quality to the task at hand. Thinking that a task is unpleasant will make you want to hurry up and finish it, so that you can focus on a more pleasant task. When you do that, you are not being mindful. And mindfulness involves doing this activity non-critically. If you are trying to focus on an activity, your mind will wander and because you know you need to bring it back to the present moment, you may try to do it. But the mind will wander a hundred times. Eventually, you may get frustrated and be critical of yourself that you are not able to be mindful. The quest for being mindful will become something which you think you fail at, and become self-critical.

Know that your mind will wander and know that mindfulness is not about staying focused the entire time. Mindfulness is about recognizing when you are defocusing and bringing yourself back. Thus, mindfulness is the practice of trying to stay in the present moment and focusing on the current task with a non-judgmental

and non-critical attitude. Mindfulness is reminding yourself that your thoughts are straying from the current task. Mindfulness is bringing your thoughts back gently to the current task when you see them wandering.

There is a psychometric test provided as PT3 in the Worksheets file - the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (Brown, & Ryan, 2003). “The trait MAAS is a 15-item scale designed to assess a core characteristic of mindfulness, namely, a receptive state of mind in which attention, informed by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place” (Brown, & Ryan, 2003). Take the test to note your mindfulness. Higher the score, the better you are at being mindful. The practice of mindfulness is very critical to recovery too, which we shall see in the next section.

In the next chapter, I am going to elaborate on the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness.

To-Do:

Complete PT3 - MAAS