“The value of mindfulness-based meditation in prison is the equivalent of an oasis to a desert beaten man.”
- Raphel J.

Mindfulness Discussion Group

Finding Peace In A Frantic World

“You can’t stop the triggering of unhappy memories, self-critical thoughts and judgmental ways of thinking – but you can stop what happens next. You can stop the spiral from feeding off itself and triggering the next cycle of negative thoughts.

Mindfulness meditation teaches you to recognize memories and damaging thoughts as they arise. It reminds you that they are memories...they are not real. They are not you. You can learn to observe negative thoughts as they arise, let them stay a while and then simply watch them evaporate before your eyes. And when this occurs, an extraordinary thing can happen: a profound sense of happiness and peace fills the void.”

-Williams & Penman: “Mindfulness: An Eight Week Plan For Finding Peace In a Frantic World.”

Know that there will be times when your mind refuses to settle. You may find yourself thinking “this is too hard,” or “it’s not working for me.” These moments are not a sign of failure. Noticing the stream of thoughts and stories, and gently returning our attention to our object of meditation gradually releases us from the power the thoughts and stories have over us. As our ability to sit with and lean into discomfort increases, we become more able to be alive and present in our life and to respond to difficulties more skillfully.
**When To Practice**

In the beginning, we encourage people to practice for short periods (5 – 10 minutes) of time. Experiment with different times during the day and find one or two that work best for you. Most people find that meditating first thing in the morning, and then later in the evening after the day has passed feel the most natural. Make a commitment to practice every day at those times, understanding that if something comes up that keeps you from practicing at your usual time, it’s no problem! Accepting life as it is and letting go of our “shoulds” is part of the practice too. Your practice will be there for you no matter what comes up.

**What To Practice**

1. **Mindfulness Of Breath/ Breath Meditation**
   Begin with three intentional, deep and even breaths. With each exhale allow yourself to relax a little bit more. Then let your breathing return to its natural rhythm. Focus your attention on your chest/ heart or stomach areas, watching and feeling the physical sensations of breathing.
   Some people find it helpful to silently say “breathing in” as they breath in, and “breathing out” as they breath out, or to count their breaths from 1-10 on the exhale, starting over when they get to 10 or when they get distracted. There is no need to try to control the breath at all – just let the breath breathe itself.

2. **Mindfulness of Sound/ Listening Meditation**
   Begin with three intentional, deep and even breaths. Close your eyes, and extend your attention outward. Now take in the sounds around you. Try not to think about them. Notice their texture, volume, and distance. Notice how they come and go. Allow them to pass through you, leaving no trace.

3. **Loving Kindness**
   Begin with three intentional, deep and even breaths. Close your eyes, and bring to mind an image of someone you love and care for very much.

**How To Practice**

In the beginning we suggest starting in a seated posture (either in a chair or cross legged on your bed) with eyes either open or closed. You may find some practices (such as loving kindness) easier to do with your eyes closed. Try and maintain a stable yet relaxed posture with a straight back and your hands in your lap or on your legs. Getting sleepy? Check and adjust your posture. And try to keep an attitude of curiosity and non-judgment, no matter what comes up or how you think you did.

**Common Difficulties**

Because we have removed distractions, it can often feel like the volume and speed of our thoughts are amplified. It is also common to experience feelings of restlessness, boredom, and sleepiness.

No matter what is happening, our response should be the same: notice and name what is happening (i.e., “thinking about the past;” “feeling restless” or just “thinking,” “restless”), gently let it go, and return your attention to the object of your meditation. As we become more aware of the transient nature of these experiences, their hold on us weakens and we experience greater freedom and happiness.