Mental Health America in Sheboygan County

Mindfulness 101

Mindfulness is tool anyone can use to be more thoughtful, less reactive, and help to regulate thoughts and emotions in order to live a more balanced life. Mindfulness is practiced used across the world and is supported by nearly 40 years of published research.

DEFINITION *Paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, with kindness and curiosity*

BENEFITS **Mindfulness helps to reduce mental, emotional, and physical stress as well as improve focus, performance, and our connection with others.** By living in the present moment through our breath and/or our five senses – touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste - we can become more skillful in handling challenging situations that arise. This allows us to coexist with our thoughts and emotions before automatically reacting, leading us to live a more fulfilling life with better stress management.

PRACTICE Sometimes our mind wanders or gets stuck on ruminating thoughts/emotions. Other times, you may find yourself being judgmental or critical of yourself or others. By practicing mindfulness consistently, you can address of these common human experiences. How so? Mindfulness practices help us to strengthen the neural connections and pathways to our pre-frontal cortex (PFC) of the brain, the "boss" or manager of our thoughts and emotions. **The PFC is responsible for planning, goal setting, flexible thinking, learning, reasoning, and it influences how we work with others.**

These simple techniques, when practiced over and over, can help you to become a more mindful being. Although research shows that 8 weeks of daily practice is the "sweet spot" to become more mindful, one can experience positive effects within just a few minutes a day. Try these simple techniques:

1. **Focus kind, non-judgmental attention on the feeling of your breath** – silently repeat "I am" for 2 seconds on your inhale, "calm" for 4 seconds on your exhale. Repeat for 2-3 minutes.

2. **Bring your attention to whatever part of your body is touching the ground.** For example, if you are sitting in a chair, you will pay attention on purpose to the feeling of the soles of your feet on the ground and your body touching the chair. Remember to take a deep breath and choose one of your five senses to help you focus your attention. You can practice this anytime you need to feel calm, perform a task, or simply be more present with the people in your life.

3. **Do your dishes or any other chore mindfully.** When completing tasks, focus on the process rather than just the end result. Pay attention on purpose with your five senses along with any thoughts or emotions that arise. Remember that if your mind wanders, simply acknowledge where it went, and bring yourself back to the present moment. For example, when washing dishes, focus on the scent of the dish soap, the temperature of the water, the feeling of the suds, and any sounds that are occurring around you. This simple tool can help make any daily chore more meaningful.

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