##### What is ‘Mindfulness’?

Mindfulness is a useful approach for dealing with unpleasant thoughts and feelings.

Most people when they are presented with unpleasant thoughts and feelings react in one of two ways:

##### Avoidance Rumination

At the one end we try to Avoid unpleasant thoughts and feelings. This can lead to the use of distraction techniques such as listening to music, staying inside, over-eating, or avoiding feared situations. Whilst this can prove to be a good strategy in the short-term, it often ends up leading to us being more afraid of those unpleasant thoughts and feelings and the things that they are linked to.

At the other end we invest a lot of effort in worrying or Ruminating about our thoughts and feelings. We try to think about them as much as we can, working out how bad things might be or what all our options are for doing something about them. This strategy often leads to us feeling completely overwhelmed by our problems. It can seem like there is no escape or nothing we can do to stop our unpleasant thoughts and feelings.

##### Avoidance Mindfulness Rumination

The strategy of Mindfulness suggests that another tactic might be more beneficial. This tactic lies in the middle of the tactics of Avoidance and Rumination.

##### How do I do ‘Mindfulness’?

In mindfulness the person does not avoid the situation, nor get overwhelmed by it. They tackle their unpleasant thoughts and feelings by noticing what they are feeling to themselves and accepting that this is the case at that moment in time (e.g. thinking “at this moment in time I am feeling upset”). Next rather than ruminating over their unpleasant thoughts and feelings, they then let go of them. This means that they do not hold on to their unpleasant thoughts and feelings once they have noticed and accepted them, they simply let them ‘wash over’.

##### Notice Accept Let Go

**What if it doesn’t work?**

In practice when people first try using mindfulness, as soon as they have noticed, accepted and let go of one set of unpleasant thoughts and feelings, these are replaced by another set of unpleasant thoughts and feelings, sometimes immediately after. Mindfulness accepts that there will be times when this happens. However the strategy remains the same. Each time a person notices they are experiencing unpleasant thoughts

and feelings they continue to simply accept them and let them go (like a river washing over you, or a conveyor belt). When using mindfulness people notice that eventually the frequency and intensity of unpleasant thoughts and feelings reduces and eventually the person no longer notices that they are feeling unpleasant.

##### Do I need to practice?

Mindfulness is not as easy as it sounds. In order to become an expert at using it you will need to practice it. Mindfulness doesn’t have to be used only when experiencing unpleasant thoughts and feelings, it can be useful to practice it as often as possible, by simply noticing what you are thinking and feeling, accepting these experiences, and letting them go. Try using mindfulness before you go to sleep. Concentrate on your breath and use mindfulness with the thoughts that pop into your head. Each time you notice a thought distracting you from your breath, notice it, accept it, and let it go. Then focus on your breath once again. Continue this process until you have fallen asleep…

##### What Mindfulness is and is Not

*A simple way of relating to our experience, which can have a profound impact on painful, negative experiences that we encounter*

Mindfulness is a useful skill for us all. It is not about trying to *get* somewhere – but to *be*

somewhere, right here, right now.

##### Characteristics of mindfulness

* + *Paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment.* Jon Kabat- Zinn
  + *Taking control of your mind, rather than allowing your mind to be in control of you.*

Marcia Linehan

* + *The knack of noticing… whatever is happening in your present experience.* Guy Claxton
  + *It is an acceptance process, not a change process.* Maggie Stanton & Christine Dunkley

##### It involves:

* + ‘Stopping’
  + Noticing
  + Accepting
  + Not judging
  + Keeping things simple
  + Letting go
  + Not living life on autopilot

##### Mindfulness is not meant to:

* + Relax you
  + Stop your mind from wandering
  + Turn negative experiences into positive ones
  + Enable you to avoid difficulty

##### What mindfulness can provide:

* + It steadies and grounds us
  + It gives us a safe platform from which to *observe*
  + It brings us closer to difficulties but without getting caught up in our reactions to them
  + It is a means of being present to our experience, however upsetting it might be
  + It allows us to slowly and gently come to grips with who we are

##### Mindfulness Practice Diary

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mindfulness Activity | Comments |
| Wednesday |  |  |
| Thursday |  |  |
| Friday |  |  |
| Saturday |  |  |
| Sunday |  |  |
| Monday |  |  |
| Tuesday |  |  |