

Wellbeing for the Bush

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is about bringing awareness to yourself and the environment around you, choosing to accept the things that fall outside of your control (such as other peoples' emotions, incurable illness and failures) and committing to changing the things you can through maintaining awareness, living in the present and noticing all the meaningful and rich moments around you. Participating in mindful practices can help reduce stress, rumination, and the effects of mental health challenges from anxiety and depression. It can also improve focus and help you live your best life.



*Mindfulness has been described as "the awareness that arises through paying attention, non-judgmentally, on purpose, in the present moment."*¹

Principles of mindfulness

These principles are not a set of instructions to follow; they are a way of 'being' and looking at life, experiences, and situations. Mindfulness practice makes life more vibrant, in which colours, tastes, smells, sights, sounds, connections and experiences become richer and more meaningful.

1. Beginner's mind

Think about how children live in the moment and so often are seeing things for the first time. Try to recreate that experience for yourself and notice the little details of what we see as the ordinary. When you look at an object, mindfully notice the shape, colours, markings, etc.

2. Patience

This refers to being patient with the process of mindfulness and being patient with yourself. Learning to be patient takes time and will only be learnt through repetition: the more you practise patience, the better at it you become. For example, you may notice your mind wandering to thoughts at work, such as, "What do I have to do next?" or "What's for dinner?" When you notice this, bring yourself back to the here and now, and remember that you are strengthening this new habit every time you do it.

3. Non-judging

Take notice of how often you judge your experiences as good, bad, or neutral. In mindfulness, we try to take the stance of an impartial witness of our own experience. Rather than judging it, we take a step back, pay attention to it with compassion and kindness, and notice how we relate to the experience. We are often our own worst critics, so rather than scold yourself for making a mistake, notice that you did something and that perhaps it could have been done differently.

4. Trust

Develop both trust in yourself and your feelings. If something doesn't feel right, honour that feeling or intuition. Listen to that 'gut feeling' when you're experiencing it, and take the time to reflect on what that may mean for you. We may make mistakes along the way, but it is better than constantly looking outside ourselves for guidance and validation.

5. Non-striving

Consider how much time and energy we put into 'purpose' or the need to achieve a goal by competing and comparing. When we do this, we judge ourselves and our actions by other people's standards (which also feeds into the principle of non-judging) and stop focusing on ourselves. There is no need to be 'the best'; being 'average' is just fine as most of the population fits into this category (think of a bell curve).

6. Acceptance

This refers to allowing things to be as they are without wishing they were different or trying to change them. Some things just 'are', and it is helpful to come to terms with this. Often, this acceptance is preceded by emotion-filled periods of denial and anger. Still, these periods of discord are sometimes required to 'shift' us to a place of being more conscious of how we are responding. One of the most well-known examples of this is the cycle of grief, whereby we often feel painful and uncomfortable feelings before we reach acceptance that someone or something is no longer with us.

7. Letting go

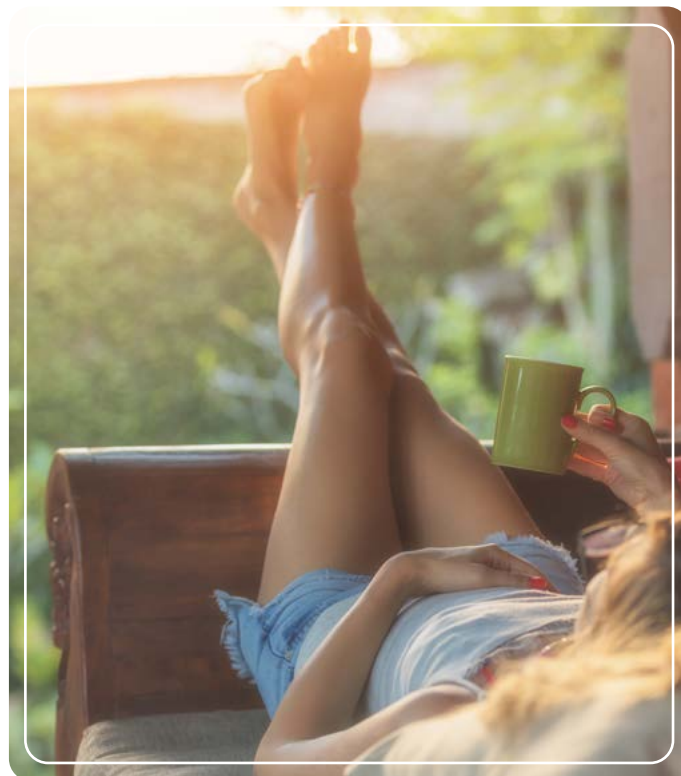
Some thoughts are helpful; others are not so helpful. Our minds can 'hook' us into getting caught up in our thoughts and stories about challenging events, which can lead to unhelpful behaviours, such as ruminating about them. By letting go of unhelpful thoughts and choosing not to buy into their stories, we 'unhook' ourselves from these thoughts and their associated behaviours.

8. Gratitude

We need to notice and be thankful for all the little things, as well as the big gestures. Having an attitude that includes gratitude can increase objective measures of physical health and increase our sense of subjective wellbeing.

9. Generosity

When we give our attention and time to others, it expands our sense of connectedness. However, this gift of generosity needs to start with ourselves. Be generous when it comes to giving yourself gifts such as self-acceptance, time for self-care and patience.



More information

9 Attitudes of Mindfulness with leading voice on Mindfulness Jon Kabat Zinn <https://youtu.be/2n7FOBFMvXg>

20 simple ways to practice Mindfulness and Awareness in everyday life <https://pleasantbuddhism.com/simple-ways-to-practice-mindfulness/>

Key principles for mindfulness practice. <https://www.catalyst14.co.uk/blog/key-principles-for-mindfulness-practice>

¹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future. *Clinical psychology science and practice*, 10(2), 144-156