



How To Do Mindfulness Right Now

As I write this, most of us are two weeks into radically changed lives. We have witnessed the gradual closures, the major changes, the social distancing that has created a reality different than we have ever lived before. It feels like a really bad movie. Except it's not.

Some of us have loved ones who are sick or have died. Some of us have seen our small businesses close or lost our jobs when everything came to an overnight halt. Some of us are risking our lives without appropriate PPE in the medical field. Some of us are experiencing increased racism. Some of us are unsure of how we are going to feed our children or pay our rent. All of us have seen our routines drastically change and our worlds deemed somewhat unrecognizable from how they were before. People are experiencing

suffering in various degrees right now. Some are doing okay, others are not, and everything in-between. Many of us are experiencing emotions we might not be accustomed to or know what to do with.

We hear words right now such as “unprecedented,” “fluid,” “uncertain” to describe the situation we are in. While accurate, these are not words that bring comfort or stability. These words often bring up fear, anxiety, and loss. So, we read articles on how to manage our

routines, our time, and our homeschooled children. The lucky of us, who have the privilege to shelter in place, share memes and use humor to laugh at ourselves while we sit around in our sweats and binge watch Netflix. We do this and it works for a while, but how do we all navigate emotionally through a situation that is so out of our collective control? How do we notice the uncertainty we all feel? What do we do when we feel worried at night and can't sleep wondering how we will pay the bills or what to do if we get sick? What do we do when we are lonely, isolated, sad, or afraid?

This is where mindfulness, or noticing, comes in. This collective problem we face is not something we fix, put a bow on it, or make better just by saying it is going to be okay. We know that for some, it is not going to be okay. For some, there will be pain. For many, there already is. The way through this is to take a moment to notice the pain, or the loneliness, or the fear, or the anxiety. Allow the emotion to be there. Give permission to feel how we feel. By noticing it, naming it, and allowing it to be there, we actually lessen the intensity of the emotion and are then better able to manage through it. For those of us who have seen the movie "Inside Out," we

know that we cannot experience joy if we do not also allow sadness. When we allow our emotions to be there and give them a label, we can use our emotions as information about ourselves. What are we thinking or needing at this moment? We can acknowledge our hurt or our pain and then take steps to provide ourselves with comfort and compassion. If we are afraid, we can work to understand what we are afraid of and ask if there is something that will help us feel safer. If we are anxious how can we work to calm our mind and our body? If we are sad, can we allow space for sadness and give ourselves time to grieve?

In these unprecedented times, many of us are feeling unprecedented emotions. Many of us are uncertain about what to do with these emotions, even if we are able to name them. We can start with mindfulness of what is around us. Notice the trees outside. Notice the colors outside the window, in the room, maybe on our toenails if we are lucky? Notice the feel of the carpet on our feet, the smell of the candle on our counter. Keep noticing the ants as they march across the sidewalk or softness of our dog's fur. By noticing and taking in what is physically around us, we become grounded in the moment. Our

brain focuses on the physical reality instead of the What-Ifs? The more we do this mindfulness thing, the better our brain gets at it. Our neural pathways for focusing on “just right now” strengthen. We can do Just Right Now. It is how we get through hard things, moment by moment. We cannot solve the what-ifs of the future. We can notice how we feel,

with compassion, and work to focus our brain on the present. Through noticing our emotions and staying present-focused, we can take a break from what we cannot control and perhaps bring awareness to small moments of joy that show up in places we may not have noticed before.



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