

Beginning Mindfulness Practice (RAN)

Mindfulness is the skill of activating the witness and watching the mind open to a more spacious awareness. We become the observer of our experience. It is a revolutionary concept for many of us to consider that we could have a thought and watch the thought at the same time, or that we could experience an emotion without it totally dominating our whole awareness. The heart of mindfulness practice is to recognize and develop the ability to witness our inner landscape without getting fully immersed in the stream of constantly arising thoughts and emotions flowing through us. Instead, as a thought, sensation or emotion arises, we do the following:

Recognize: We are present to the experience and observe it from the witness, bringing awareness to it. We don't react, avoid or distract ourselves from what is. Then we name it ie. "I'm feeling _____". UCLA research has shown that when we name a disturbing emotion, it activates the prefrontal cortex and calms the amygdala.

Accept: We welcome and accept the experience (thought, sensation, feeling) without judging it or choosing to like or dislike it/want it or not want it. Instead, we view it with curiosity, open-mindedness, acceptance and love (COAL). We learn to accept and make peace with what is.

Non-identify: We realize that we are not the thought, sensation or feeling. We do not identify with the experience; instead we are the observer/witness of it. We then dis-identify with it. Statements that can help are: "Here am I experiencing _____ (anger)." Or, "A wave of _____ (anxiety) is trying to overtake me." Or, "A part of me is experiencing _____ (sadness).