

## Being Present and Aware—Mindfulness

By

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Freud said depressed people rue the past and anxious individuals fear the future. More than a century later psychologists are currently emphasizing “mindfulness”—being “aware,” focused, and “being in the present.”

To be “mindful” means being cognizant of the present situation in a most complete fashion. You are aware of your thoughts, cognitive feelings, and physiological sensations, particularly your breathing. You are also alert to how you are perceiving others (if you are with a person or several people) and how they may be perceiving you.

Being present and aware is difficult. We love to multi-task; we are easily distracted; our mind frequently races; and often while engaged in an activity we contemporaneously reflect on some past event or project into the future. This universal lack of mindfulness and focus causes numerous problems: mistakes at work or at home; motor vehicle accidents; misplacing items; tasks left undone; being chronically late; unsatisfactory conversations; uninspiring sex; friends and loved ones feeling unheard; and you are perceived as uninterested or uninvolved. Finally, and very importantly, you feel stressed.

Mindfulness, like many skills can be trained: First, commit to the concept of being focused and present. Second, reduce distractions and background noise. Third, strive to concentrate and focus: work to complete a task; condition yourself that if you take something out, you put it back when you’re done; with others maintain eye contact and listen to truly hear. Fourth, practice “being in the moment;” take a minute to breathe rhythmically—inhale through your nose, “smell the candle” and exhale through your mouth, “blow out the candle,” at the same rate.

One of the many wonders of young children is that they are clear examples of “being in the now.” All they want to do is play. They aren’t hampered much by the past and they certainly aren’t worrying about the future. We should all try to be that “centered” at least once per day.

Learning to be focused and mindful is a gift. That is why it’s called the present. Freud, in this case, was right.

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