



SAINT MARY'S
UNIVERSITY SINCE 1802

COUNSELLING
CENTRE

STUDENT SERVICES

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is being aware of yourself, others, and your surroundings in the moment. It is calming, grounding, and centering and is an excellent stress reducer. Practicing mindfulness helps to create a more present and more peaceful way of life. Mindfulness means being consciously, compassionately, and non-judgmentally present to what is happening NOW.

There are four elements:

(1) Paying attention, (2) living in the moment, (3) simplifying, and (4) breathing

1. Almost any person or thing we give our close attention to gains value in our hearts and minds. This is because it increases our understanding and appreciation. Because paying loving attention often results in valuing, understanding, and enjoying what you pay attention to, it's incredibly important that you place yourself near or at the top of your pay-attention to list. It also allows us to recognize habits and behaviors that no longer add value and joy to our lives – you can then make a different choice that will lead to increased well-being, health, peace of mind, calm, and balance.

2. Where do the past and future fit? It is possible to think about the past or the future while being fully in the present moment, as long as we are conscious of the fact that we are doing so. It is when we do so unconsciously or allow it to overwhelm or overshadow the present moment that dwelling in the past or future is unhealthy.

3. Our time and energy are often consumed by demands of multiple obligations and opportunities. Mindful moments calm our souls, quiet our minds, and open our hearts. When there is clutter in our homes...simplifying creates inner and outer space and space invites serenity.

4. Breath is the bridge between body and mind and the gateway to the present moment. It's important to pay attention to the breath, deepen the breath, and direct the breath to areas in our body and mind that need relief. Breathing from the diaphragm triggers the relaxation response in the body.

Mindful living is Conscious, Calm, Purposeful, Grateful, and Focused: it promotes peace and awareness.

Automatic living is Unconscious, Habitual, Restless, Rushed, and Scattered: it creates anxiety, depression and fear.

Mindfulness:

- Helps you live life more fully
- Quiets your mind, opens your heart and brings about balance
- Relaxes your body, reduces stress
- Retrains your brain
- Enhances appreciation and gratitude
- Helps you break unhealthy habits
- Minimizes scatteredness and distraction
- Increases energy
- Helps you love yourself and others more freely and deeply

How to practice Mindfulness:

BREATHE! It's ironic that our impulse to close down and constrict breathing during stressful times is exactly the opposite of helpful. Shallow breathing actually causes stress in the body, while breathing deeply from your diaphragm oxygenates your brain, grounds you in your body, and maximizes your mental, emotional, and physical capabilities. Take a couple minutes to breathe deeply and quiet your mind. As thoughts come up, just

observe them and let them go, bringing focus back to your breath. Doing this a few times throughout the day can be calming and relaxing.

“STOP – LOOK – LISTEN – FEEL”: pausing to take note of what you’re seeing, hearing, and feeling is an incredibly important touchstone for mindful living. A few 60 second check-ins throughout the day can make an amazing difference in how you feel and can also lay valuable groundwork for building mindful habits. If you are walking outside: feel your feet hitting the ground; breathe deeply – what do you smell? Look around – what colors do you see? How does the air feel on your skin? What do you hear – are there any birds singing?

Practice mindful eating:

- Consciously choose what to eat.
- Sit down to eat (not in a car, unless it’s stopped)
- Pay attention to each bite and chew slowly.
- Only eat. Or accompany eating only with conversation.
- Feel gratitude for the food you eat.
- Notice how the food you eat affects your body.

