



## Principles of Mindfulness

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The word “mindfulness” is popping up in conversation more and more each day. It seems to be rising in popularity and everyone is doing it. But, what is mindfulness? And does everyone have the same definition of it? Outlined below are the key principles of mindfulness and a detailed explanation of what each principle means.

*BE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT*

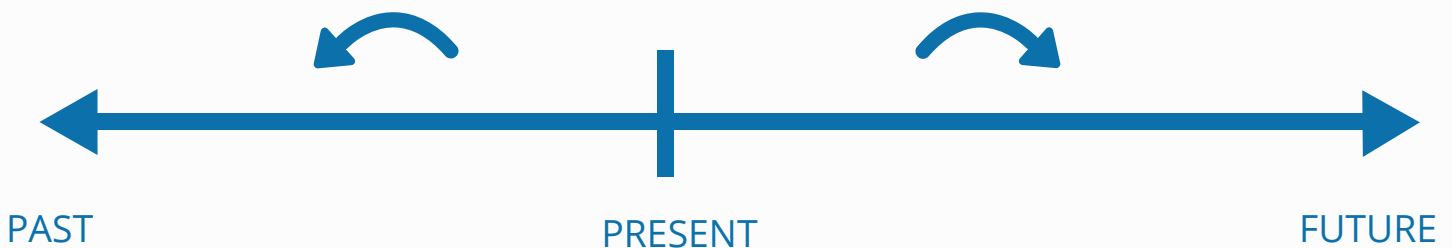
*BE NON-JUDGMENTAL AND OBJECTIVE*

*PRACTICE ACCEPTANCE*

### BE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

The human mind wanders. That’s what it does. We find ourselves thinking about the past (sometimes as recently as a few minutes ago, and other times as far as weeks and years ago). We also often find our minds shooting into the future, which breeds worry and anxiety. Being present is not about intensely trying to focus on right now, non-stop. That’s not human or natural. Instead, it is about **gently noticing when your attention has drifted away from the present and gently redirecting your attention back to the now.**

Of course, sometimes we do need to think ahead or reflect on the past. However, this is done **with purpose**. If we are stuck in the present or past without an aim, we aren’t problem solving anymore. Just stuck.



## BE NON-JUDGMENTAL AND OBJECTIVE

Being non-judgmental and objective is about approaching something **without the influence of personal feelings or opinions**. It is about seeing something as if for the first time. Experiencing something **without assumptions or predictions**, without negative or positive filters and biases. Imagine yourself as a baby, seeing the world for the first time without any preconceived notions of good or bad.

### A note on using past experience to predict the future.

Some people are reluctant to look at something old as if for the first time, when they might have prior knowledge about it. They might say, but surely it is better to consider the past. Isn't the past a good predictor of the future? Well, that depends. While the past can be a good predictor of the future, it is not a perfect predictor. Furthermore, your past memories may have been encoded more negatively than they actually were, especially if you had a negative filter on during the time of encoding.

**The past can predict the future if you do everything the same as last time.** But if you take a different approach even in the way that you think about a situation (such as looking at it with fresh eyes), the variables have already changed, and there's a chance something different will happen this time. One of the best ways to ensure that the past will happen again is by assuming it will happen or expecting it to. This is called a **self-fulfilling prophecy**, where we make a prediction and then subconsciously take action that actually increases the chances of that prediction happening.

## PRACTICE ACCEPTANCE

This one is a tricky one and requires some careful consideration. Before you practice acceptance, it is important to ask yourself a number of questions when facing a difficult thought, feeling, sensation, or situation.

- 1) Do you have control over the situation, right now, in this immediate moment?
- 2) Is there an action you can take, right now, in this immediate moment that would help in the short and long term? (Problem solving and planning to take an action in the future are also helpful actions that can be taken in the immediate moment).
- 3) Is the effort that I put in right now by taking action worth it in the short and long term to my mental and physical wellbeing?
- 4) Is the action that I want to take in the immediate moment consistent with the kind of person I want to be? Will I be living in accordance with the kind of life I want to live?

If after considering these questions, you come to the decision that you do not want to take an action in the immediate moment and/or you can see that it is an unhelpful action, then the next step is to practice ACCEPTANCE.

## So what is acceptance?

Firstly, we must consider what it is not. Acceptance is not forcing oneself to like a situation, it is not resigning, it is not giving up, and it is not about being passive. Acceptance is something that we practice only in the immediate moment. Acceptance is accepting that right now, in this moment, we have no control and that is ok. It is not assuming that you will not have control in the future, only right now.

## What if I don't want to accept?

You only have one other choice then. If you cannot accept a situation, but you cannot change it, you will enter a struggle with reality, which will inevitably lead to more suffering and pain than you originally felt before you started struggling with the situation. It's a harsh truth but an important one.

## Is that really it? Accept or struggle? What if I'm really feeling like I'm not coping?

### HOW PSYCHOLOGY CAN HELP

Remember, if there is something that you can do to help remedy the situation, and this action will be helpful in the short and long term, then it's important to do it. Acceptance can be a helpful strategy. It may help alleviate the intensity of unpleasant emotions such as sadness, anxiety, jealousy, and anger. Sometimes, letting go of the fight with ourselves, the world around us, and our emotions can really have a big impact on how we experience life. However, learning some other strategies that can help you feel more in control in a situation can be useful too.

There are a number of strategies taught by psychologists that compliment acceptance. These include emotion regulation strategies, distress tolerance techniques, urge surfing, grounding, and relaxation techniques.

**Dr Liza Chervonsky is a doctor-level clinical psychologist who treats a number of common issues including anxiety, low mood, anger management, social and relationship difficulties, work and academic issues, and personality issues. She treats adults, children, adolescents, and parents. She works from a number of therapeutic modalities, including CBT, DBT, ACT, mindfulness, and schema therapy.**

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