

# **When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Mindful:**

## **A Toolkit Based on the Principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy**



Created by Jeremy Jenkins & Andrew Ahles: [admin@helpwithact.com](mailto:admin@helpwithact.com)  
[www.helpwithact.com](http://www.helpwithact.com)

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# **When the Going Gets Tough, the Tough Get Mindful**

## Contents

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| General Information and What to Expect | 3  |
| Weekly Rating Sheet                    | 4  |
| Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control    | 5  |
| Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion       | 12 |
| Module 3: Past, Future & Present       | 26 |
| Module 4: The Observing Self           | 35 |
| Module 5: Values & Committed Action    | 39 |
| Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?    | 48 |
| Bibliography                           | 54 |

## General Information and What to Expect

- This Toolkit is based on an approach to treatment called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). At its most basic, this approach is about learning new skills to deal with painful thoughts and feelings in a way that allows you to live a better life.
- The general format for each module is:
  - Step One: Rate how well your life is working
  - Step Two: Review the practice exercises you've been working on
  - Step Three: Learn and discuss the main ideas for the current module
  - Step Four: Practice new skills
  - Step Five: Plan your practice exercises for the next module
- As we work through this toolkit together, you will have the final say in what works and what doesn't, based on your experience. If your experience shows that what you are doing works, keep doing it! If your experience tells you that your choices are not working for you, consider trying something different.
- What you get out of this toolkit will depend a great deal on how much you put into it. Your mind will probably try to get in the way of doing the exercises we recommend, by telling you things like "I don't have time, this won't help, it's too difficult, I can just imagine doing the exercise instead of actually doing it," etc. If this happens, you can choose to say to your mind, "Thanks for the advice, mind! But I'm going to give this a try anyway and see what happens. I'm going to let my *experience* decide instead of my thoughts." If you do choose to say this to your mind and move ahead with the toolkit, we believe you will benefit a great deal from learning the information and practicing the exercises inside.
- Many sources were used directly and indirectly in the creation of this toolkit. Direct sources or adaptations are specifically credited, while other sources that informed and inspired this work are listed in the bibliography.

## Weekly Rating Sheet

**On a scale from 0 to 100, how well is your life working?**

|                |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Date →</b>  |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Scale ↓</b> | <b>The way I'm spending each day makes me feel alive and fulfilled</b>                                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>100</b>     |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>95</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>90</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>85</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>80</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>75</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>70</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>65</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>60</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>55</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>50</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>45</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>40</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>35</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>30</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>25</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>20</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>15</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>10</b>      |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>5</b>       |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>0</b>       |                                                                                                          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                | <b>The way I'm spending each day makes life seem pointless, meaningless, and not worth living at all</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

## Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control

### Step One

Using the Weekly Rating Sheet, please rate how well your life is working.

### Step Two

Main Ideas:

1. Pain is a fact of life. Every human being experiences pain.

→ Please watch “The 3 Happiness Myths” [4:02]:

<https://youtu.be/93LFNtcR1Ok>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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2. We get to choose how we respond to pain. Some choices will make things worse and lead to suffering. Other choices will help us live a better life.

→ Please watch “The Choice Point - By Dr. Russ Harris” [3:55]:

<https://youtu.be/OV15x8LvwAQ?si=jm5CoEm78tARbNMd>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control

3. It is common and normal to respond to pain by trying to control our thoughts and feelings. We want to cling to the good ones and push the bad ones away.

→ Please watch “Internal Struggles by Dr. Russ Harris” [2:28]:  
<https://youtu.be/phbzSNsY8vc>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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4. The bad news: Over the long run, trying to control our thoughts and feelings does not often work very well. Our negative thoughts and feelings don’t tend to go away forever. Trying to control them might seem to help in the short term, but eventually it can lead to more suffering and cause other serious consequences.

→ Please fill in a few lines from “My Coping Strategies.” You can add more between modules if you are willing to look deeper into how these attempted solutions have affected you.

## Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control

### My Coping Strategies

| Please list a few of the ways you have been coping with your difficult thoughts and feelings: | Does this strategy work in the short term? Do you feel better? | Does this strategy work in the long term? Do the difficult thoughts and feelings show up again? | Does this strategy have any negative consequences or cause any problems of its own? Does it help you live a better life? |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                               |                                                                |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                               |                                                                |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                               |                                                                |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                               |                                                                |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                               |                                                                |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                          |

If any of these coping skills are working for you and aren't causing their own problems, keep using them! If any of them are not working or are creating other problems for you, this toolkit will offer you some alternative skills to try.

## Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control

5. The good news: There are psychological tools we can learn to use instead of trying to control our thoughts and feelings. These skills can help us live a better life.

→ Please watch “The Unwelcome Party Guest - an Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) Metaphor” [4:20]:

<https://youtu.be/VYht-guymF4>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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### Step Three

Practice new skills:

- Dropping Anchor: Sometimes when negative thoughts and feelings threaten to overwhelm us, the most effective response we can have is focusing on the present. This is like a ship dropping an anchor in the middle of a storm. It doesn't stop the storm from happening, but it keeps the ship from getting blown off course. Here's how you do it: Let your thoughts and emotions continue to run and at the same time press your feet firmly into the floor. Notice your body sitting in your chair. Pay attention to the air in your lungs as you take a few normal breaths. Look around the room and notice where you are. Notice that we are here working together and that you are in a safe environment. Let's try that together now.
- The following exercise will help you experience the main concepts of the ACT approach. Sometimes it is easier to understand something if you experience it, rather than have someone try to explain it to you in words. As I read the following exercise to you, follow along as best you can with the instructions as I'm reading them. Don't worry if you get distracted or lose focus. This is normal. Just refocus on the exercise as soon as you notice that your mind has wandered.



## **Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control**

### Introduction to ACT

Please find a comfortable position in your chair; one where you can stay relatively still for about 5 to 10 minutes. I recommend feet flat on the floor with arms on your legs or folded in your lap, but feel free to do whatever is most comfortable for you.

If you feel comfortable closing your eyes, please do so; or you can simply pick a spot in the room to focus on.

Take a few moments to mentally scan your body from head to toe... Notice if there are any areas of tension such as your jaw or shoulders... If you notice any tension, see if you can let some of that tension go... If not, that's okay, just notice what's there.

Take a few moments to connect with your sense of touch... Notice what physical sensations are happening in your hands... See if you can feel where your hands make contact with each other or with your legs... See if you can feel your feet on the ground...

Next, take a few moments to notice what you can hear... There may be several sounds, or just one, or it may be silent. Just notice whatever is there...

When you're ready, move your attention to your breathing... Watch the breath come in and go out on its own, without you having to control it... See if you can feel your breath in your nose or your belly...

As you breathe, you will notice that thoughts may come into your mind... They may be pleasant thoughts, or unpleasant thoughts, or neutral thoughts... This is what the human mind does, it is a thinking machine... Just see if you can notice the thoughts without getting caught up in them, and then return your attention to your breathing... Each time a thought pops up, notice it and then return your attention to your breath... This will happen over and over and over again, and that's okay, it means you're normal... With practice you can get better at noticing your thoughts, rather than getting carried away by them.

As you continue breathing, you will notice that certain feelings or emotions will also show up... Some of these may be pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, or neutral feelings... See if you can notice these feelings the same way you notice your thoughts... There is no need to try and change what's there, just try to notice what you feel... When you notice a feeling, see if you can locate where it is in your body... Notice what sensations come along with the emotion... There may be heaviness, lightness, warmth, coolness, tingling, or tension... You may find these sensations in your head, shoulders, arms, legs, or abdomen...

## **Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control**

Whatever you feel and wherever it happens, just notice what's going on and see if you can let it be...

And now see if you can return your attention to your breathing... See if you can notice that there is a part of you that's able to watch your breathing, watch your thoughts, watch your feelings, watch the sensations that happen in your body... There is a part of you that does the thinking and feeling, and a part of you that can notice the thinking and feeling... Take a few moments to experience what it's like to connect with the part of you that just notices...

And now take a few moments to consider what brought you here today... There is something you care so much about that you took steps to get here... Just reflect for a few moments about what it is that you really, truly care about most in your life... Recognize and appreciate the fact that you made a choice to take action for change... And as the exercise comes to a close, see if you can bring to mind an image of what kind of person you want to be when you are handling your pain effectively... Consider how you'll be acting toward other people... How you'll be acting toward yourself...

And when you're ready, slowly bring your attention back to the room and back to where we are now. If you like, move your fingers and toes around and have a nice stretch.

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Module 1: Pain, Suffering & Control

### Step Four

Between now and the next module:

- If you are willing, fill in a few more lines from “My Coping Strategies” to see how effective your past or current coping strategies are.
- If you are willing, try the “dropping an anchor” technique anytime negative thoughts and feelings are threatening to overwhelm you. If you practice this, briefly notice or write how you act after you drop anchor.
- Please decide how often you are willing to read through the “Introduction to ACT” exercise from today’s module and write your answer in the space below. It can be once a day, every two days, or just one time between now and the next module. You decide. Just try your best to practice as many times as you are willing. Don’t worry if you don’t reach your target. We’re not aiming for perfection, just for trying our best. Whatever happens, come to the next appointment. Sometimes difficult thoughts and feelings interfere in our lives and keep us from doing the things we set out to do. This is normal! And this is exactly what we will be learning about in Module 2.

Between now and the next appointment, this is how often (or how many times) I am willing to practice the “Introduction to ACT” exercise:

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## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

### Step One

Using the Weekly Rating Sheet, please rate how well your life is working.

### Step Two

Looking back at the last module, this is how often I was willing to practice the “Introduction to ACT” exercise: \_\_\_\_\_

This is how often I did practice: \_\_\_\_\_

This is what the experience was like for me -AND/OR- These are the thoughts and feelings that got in the way of practicing as often as I set out to (ex. “I don’t have time, this won’t help, it’s too difficult,” depression, anxiety, etc.):

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### Step Three

Main Ideas:

1. Since we can’t always control our negative thoughts and feelings, the alternative is to make room for them. This doesn’t mean we like them or want them around, but we are willing for them to be there.

→ Please watch “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Acceptance” [1:46]:  
<https://youtu.be/jrmKtaMqOh4>

## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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2. When we spend less time trying to control our negative thoughts and feelings, we have more freedom to make choices that improve our lives.

→ Please watch “The Struggle Switch - By Dr. Russ Harris” [3:02]:  
<https://youtu.be/rCp1l16GCXI>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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3. We can make room for our negative thoughts and feelings by practicing skills called mindfulness and defusion.

→ Please watch “Accepting the Mind” [1:06]:  
<https://youtu.be/qUcC71-W9Os>

→ Please watch “Changing Perspective” [1:16]:  
<https://youtu.be/iN6g2mr0p3Q>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

4. Research has shown mindfulness and defusion skills to be very effective.

→ Please watch “Why Mindfulness Is a Superpower: An Animation” [2:43]: <https://youtu.be/w6T02g5hnT4>

→ Please watch “What Do We Have All Wrong About Meditation? Featuring Dan Harris” [4:11]: <https://youtu.be/JP7o4BKG6hM>

→ You can read more about the benefits of mindfulness before the next appointment if you are willing (see Step Five)

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Mindfulness and defusion aren’t about controlling negative thoughts and feelings. The purpose is not to make us feel better (although sometimes this does happen), the goal is to reduce the *impact* that negative thoughts and feelings have on us. Remember from Module 1 that negative thoughts and feelings never go away for good. The aim is to give ourselves the freedom to make choices that improve our lives.

### Step Four

Practice new skills:

→ The following exercise will help you experience the process of mindfulness. Sometimes it is easier to understand something if you experience it, rather than have someone try to explain it to you in words. As I read the following exercise to you, follow along as best you can with the instructions as I’m reading them. Don’t worry if you get distracted or lose focus. This is normal. Just refocus on the exercise as soon as you notice that your mind has wandered.

#### Mindfulness of Emotions Script

Position yourself comfortably in the chair...feet flat on the floor, arms placed comfortably, chair fully supporting your body... allow your eyes to close...begin by paying attention to your breathing, taking a few long breaths to get settled...

Now gently guide your attention to how you are feeling emotionally within yourself at this moment...note whatever feelings arise within you whether they be positive, neutral or negative...whether they be strong or weak in intensity...they are all just emotions...all just feelings to be felt. Whatever feelings arise, remind yourself that it is OK to allow yourself to feel it. Remember that you are not your emotions, you are the watcher of your emotions. Take some time just to observe your emotional experience, making no attempt to change how you are feeling...

You might label the emotion to yourself (i.e., "ah there is calmness/ happiness/ indifference/ surprise/ boredom/ frustration/ fear/ sadness, etc")...You might describe where and how you feel the emotion in your body...take time to notice the physical signs that you are feeling the way you feel...

Watch as the emotion changes in intensity and nature. Bring whatever image to mind that helps you be the watcher of your emotions (e.g., *seeing your emotion like an ocean wave, express train, cloud floating in the sky, leaf floating on a stream, an empty room, a naughty child, etc*)...

You don't have to buy into your emotions and get swept up in them. You don't need to change your emotions, fight them or get rid of them. You are just here to watch, observe and experience what is going on right now. See if you can make some space for the emotion, seeing it as part of a broader landscape within you that contains lots of things like other feelings, thoughts, memories, body sensations, etc. Your emotions are just emotions...your feeling just feelings...nothing more and nothing less...

When you have fully experienced whatever emotion is there, and the experience has run its natural course, redirect your attention towards your breath...note each inhalation and each exhalation...bind your attention to the back and forth movement of the belly as you breathe in and out...note the sensations in your body as you draw breath in and then out again. Take some time now to allow your breath to be your anchor to the present moment...

If your mind wanders away from the breath to an emotion, or thought or sensation. That's ok, that's what minds do. Congratulate yourself for noticing, and give your mind the time to again observe and watch what you are experiencing... Once that observation has run its natural course, again gently bring your attention back to the breath as your anchor to the present...

Try to continue your mindfulness practice for the next 10 minutes or more...

When you feel ready, you can gradually open your eyes, bringing this mindfulness exercise to a close...



## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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### Step Five:

Between now and the next appointment:

- If you are willing, please read the article “7 Really Good Reasons to Start a Mindfulness Meditation Practice” by Jennfier Abbasi. If you are feeling ambitious, you can also read “The Skeptic’s Guide to Meditation” by Dan Harris.
- If you are willing, please select one or more of the methods listed below to help you practice mindfulness and defusion skills. You can also practice with the Mindfulness of Emotions script from today’s module:

### YouTube Videos:

- “Leaves On a Stream” [7:57]: <https://youtu.be/yIlZHoiOb0s>
- “Making space” [9:32]: <https://youtu.be/Qkw89NRcowA>
- “Observing & Naming Thoughts, Mindfulness Exercise with Naomi Goodlet” [9:47]: <https://youtu.be/AVRGF3e4Zxw>
- “Exploring the Difficult Meditation” [24:00]: <https://youtu.be/Qu7blXX1a8A>
- “10 Min Sitting Meditation” [9:49]: <https://youtu.be/2L00t5VeVjQ>

### Free Apps for Your Phone:

- Calm: Includes a free 7-day course on the basics of mindfulness
- Headspace: Includes a free 10-day course on the basics of mindfulness including explainer videos like the one from today’s module



## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

- One Moment Meditation: Starts with a 5 minute video about how to meditate in just 60 seconds a day, then has a timer with an optional guided introduction and conclusion. <https://youtu.be/F6eFFCi12v8>
- Insight Timer: Has many free guided exercises
- Smiling Mind: Has many free guided exercises

At first glance, the method that looks most appealing to me is:

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I am willing to practice with this (or any other method I end up liking better) this many times before next appointment:

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Again, don't worry if you don't reach your target. We're not aiming for perfection, just for trying our best. Whatever happens, come to the next appointment.

## **Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion**

### **7 Really Good Reasons to Start a Mindfulness Meditation Practice**

By Jennfier Abbasi

<http://my.happify.com/hd/7-benefits-of-meditation/>

Meditation used to feel like something reserved for yoga addicts, but growing research is showing benefits for the mind and body that every one of us could use.

#### **Meditation Helps You Sleep Sounder**

Researchers at the University of Minnesota looked at seven studies on mindfulness meditation and sleep, concluding that the practice helps some people get better rest. Meditation might help people break the cycle of obsessing about not being able to get to sleep, which makes it harder to your zzz's, says Nicole Winbush, who co-authored the study. Reducing stress hormones like cortisol, which can interfere with sleep, may also help.

#### **Meditation Eases Pain**

Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help ease chronic discomfort like neck and back pain, arthritis, fibromyalgia and recurring headaches. It teaches you to open your senses to your breathing, the sound of the wind rustling or the feel of the sun on your skin, says Jeffrey Greeson, a clinical health psychologist at Duke University. "If some attention's going toward other things, the pain's not going to bother you as much," Greeson says.

#### **Meditation Improves Your Ability to Focus**

"Mindfulness training improves your ability to maintain attention and regulate emotional distractions," says Fadel Zeidan, a cognitive neuroscientist at Wake Forest School of Medicine. In one study he conducted, people who did 20-minute meditation sessions for just four days did significantly better on timed cognitive tests than a control group. The meditators were better able to ignore the timer and simply focus on the task, he explains.

#### **Meditation Reduces Anxiety and Stress**

Recent studies are proving that meditation can actually lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in our bodies. And in a new study by Zeidan, levels of everyday anxiety decreased by a whopping 39 percent after just four 20-minute mindfulness meditation classes. How? Being more aware of our immediate experiences through meditation may keep us from stewing over the past or worrying about the future.

## **Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion**

### **Meditation Makes You Feel Less Moody**

Many of us automatically interpret things in a negative way and assume the worst about ourselves and others. This can cause depression, which meditation has been shown to alleviate. “One of the reasons why meditation is effective for mood and depression is because it helps us not believe these automatic thoughts that we have,” says Greeson. “It involves focusing on what’s possible, not what’s impossible.”

### **Meditation Improves Your Sex Life**

Your sex life could get a boost with mindfulness meditation, which enhances the connections and size of an area of the brain called the insula that’s important for awareness. Strengthening the insula may be what helps some women pay better attention to arousal after meditation training—and even have better orgasms—says Marsha Lucas, Ph.D., a neuropsychologist in Washington, D.C.

### **Meditation Helps You Heal Faster and Live Longer**

In a study last year, people who took eight weeks of mindfulness meditation training had far fewer cases of colds and flu and less severe infections compared to a group of non-meditators. Daniel Muller, a doctor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who worked on this study, says meditation may help to restore the body’s homeostatic balance. It may even help us live longer by keeping our DNA from degrading over time, according to recent research at the University of California, San Francisco.



## **The Skeptic's Guide to Meditation**

**If you've ever considered (but instantly dismissed) the practice, this one's for you.**

<http://my.happify.com/hd/skeptics-guide-to-meditation-infographic-dan-harris/>

## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

### THE 4 BIGGEST MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MEDITATION

You may have heard about all those studies suggesting a long list of health benefits from meditation, from reducing stress to boosting resilience, but perhaps one of these assumptions prevented you from giving it a shot.



## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

### THE SCIENCE

#### What Does Meditation Do to the Brain?



In a **2011** study at Harvard, researchers took people who had never meditated before, and had them do short, daily doses of the practice.

Then they scanned their brains—and found that the gray matter in the areas associated with wellbeing and compassion literally grew, while areas associated with stress literally shrank.

The practice has also been shown to boost focus and decrease age-related cognitive decline.

#### Meditation Reduces Stress

Mindfulness doesn't just make us feel less stressed, it's also linked to lower levels of cortisol (the stress hormone).



An average of **12.5 minutes** of meditation per day for **8 weeks** increased Marines' resistance to stress, according to a 2011 study.

**TIP**



Try to meditate every day. Regularity, many experts believe, is more important than duration. **Remember: just 5 minutes!**

#### Meditation Makes Us More Compassionate

There's a type of meditation called "compassion meditation." It's been shown to make:



Preschoolers more willing to give their stickers away to strangers.



Grown-ups to laugh more, socialize more, and use the word "I" less.

## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion



### Meditation Boosts Self-Acceptance

People who regularly practice mindfulness meditation are more accepting of their emotions, which in turn, boosts self-control, resilience, and performance.

**TIP**



When meditating, every time you get lost in thought, just return your attention to feeling your breath.

(Yes, you'll have to start over countless times—that's the whole game!)

### The List of Health Benefits is Almost Laughably Long

Brain imaging studies show that meditation can:



Lower high blood pressure



Lessen chronic pain



Reduce anxiety



Fight depression

Meditation has also been shown to help with:

- ☒ ADHD
- ☒ Psoriasis
- ☒ Irritable bowel syndrome



## 40-60%

of high-blood pressure patients in a study at Massachusetts General Hospital experienced a significant reduction in blood pressure after meditating regularly for 3 months.

### It May Help You Sleep Better, Too

A University of Utah study found that higher mindfulness was associated with lower cognitive and physiological activation at bedtime, which could have benefits for sleep quality.



## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

### WHY MINDFULNESS MATTERS

#### WHAT IS

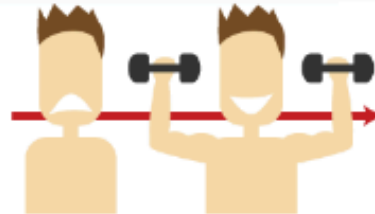


It's a boring-sounding word, but it's a game-changing, life-altering proposition.



It's the ability to be aware of your thoughts and emotions, without judging them. Or, to put it more simply, it allows you to see what's going on in your head without getting carried away by it.

This is a basic human capacity we all have. Think of mindfulness as a muscle. When you build this muscle through the exercise of meditation, it can help you in the following, phenomenally useful ways:



**1**  
You'll get better at not being carried away by passing emotional squalls



**2**  
You'll learn to **respond**, rather than **react** to the stuff that comes up in your life



**3**  
Your happiness will depend less on unstable, constantly changing external circumstances

#### EXAMPLE



Normally, when someone cuts you off in traffic, you automatically think, "I'm pissed." —and then you actually become pissed. Mindfulness allows you to slow that process down so you can respond thoughtfully instead of react mindlessly. It provides space between impulse and action.

The simple act of feeling the breath can break the habits of a lifetime.



## Module 2: Mindfulness & Defusion

### MEDITATION 101

To get started, all you need to do is...



Sit up straight with eyes closed. (You don't have to sit cross-legged if that's uncomfortable – a chair is fine.)



Focus your full attention on the feeling of your breath coming in and going out.



Every time your mind wanders (which it will – a million times), just return your attention to the feeling of the breath.



“If you don’t waste your energy on variables you cannot influence, you can focus much more effectively on those you can.”

—Dan Harris,  
ABC News anchor &  
author of *10% Happier*

### Module 3: Past, Future & Present

#### Step One

Using the Weekly Rating Sheet, please rate how well your life is working.

#### Step Two

Looking back at the last module, this is how many times I was willing to practice mindfulness and defusion: \_\_\_\_\_

This is how often I did practice: \_\_\_\_\_

This is the method or methods I used: \_\_\_\_\_

These are the articles I read (Please circle one, both, or neither):

- 7 Really Good Reasons to Start a Mindfulness Meditation Practice
- The Skeptic's Guide to Meditation
- Neither

This is what the experience was like for me -AND/OR- These are the thoughts and feelings that got in the way of practicing as often as I set out to (ex. "I don't have time, this won't help, it's too difficult," depression, anxiety, etc.):

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## Module 3: Past, Future & Present

### Step Three

Main Ideas:

1. Pain and suffering come from negative thoughts and feelings about the past or the future.
2. The present moment is a safe place that we can learn to connect with at any time.

→ Please watch “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Presence” [2:34]:  
<https://youtu.be/kthk-vmQ02A>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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3. When we practice being in the present, negative thoughts and feelings about the past or future have less impact on us.

→ Please watch “Dan Harris: Hack Your Brain's Default Mode with Meditation” [3:43]: <https://youtu.be/FAcTlrA2Qhk>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Connecting with the present isn’t about controlling how we think and feel, it’s about having the freedom to make choices that improve our lives.

## Module 3: Past, Future & Present

### Step Four

Practice new skills:

- Please choose one of the options below to help you experience the process of present moment awareness. Sometimes it is easier to understand something if you experience it, rather than have someone try to explain it to you in words. As you listen to whichever exercise you choose, follow along as best you can with the instructions. Don't worry if you get distracted or lose focus. This is normal. Just refocus on the exercise as soon as you notice that your mind has wandered.

Option 1:

3 minute body scan from UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center

Please click here:

<https://d1cy5zxxhbcbk.cloudfront.net/guided-meditations/Body-Scan-Meditation.mp3>

Option 2:

10 minute exercise on Mindfully Eating A Raisin by Mindfulness Meditation

Please click here: <https://youtu.be/NlGuRVBeLVA>

Option 3:

7 minute exercise on noticing the details of your hand from Naomi Goodlet

Please click here: <https://youtu.be/Fq-MqZDkKdQ>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Module 3: Past, Future & Present**

#### Step Five:

Between now and the next appointment:

- If you are willing, please select one or more of the methods listed below to help you practice connecting with the present moment:

#### YouTube Videos:

“Meditation 101: A Beginner's Guide” [2:00]: <https://youtu.be/o-kMJBWk9E0>

“10-Minute Meditation to Reframe Stress” [10:10]:  
<https://youtu.be/sG7DBA-mgFY>

“Automatic Breathing Mindfulness Exercise With Naomi Goodlet” [6:45]:  
[https://youtu.be/Hk\\_YDdDVCQ](https://youtu.be/Hk_YDdDVCQ)

“Guided Breathing Exercise (Clouds)” [4:51]: <https://youtu.be/awc8MLSpjIQ>

#### Free Mindfulness Resources:

- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: Recordings of a variety of mindfulness exercises for use in various situations.  
<http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>
- One Moment Meditation: Starts with a 5 minute video about how to get present in just 60 seconds a day, then has a timer with an optional guided introduction and conclusion. <https://youtu.be/F6eFFCi12v8>

#### Other Exercises (found on the pages that follow, in order):

- Eating One Raisin: A First Taste of Mindfulness (*feel free to substitute a different piece of fruit, chocolate or other candy if you prefer*)
- Mindful Breathing
- Mindfulness Exercises

### **Module 3: Past, Future & Present**

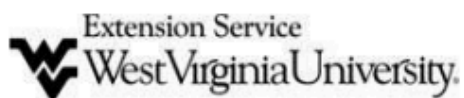
At first glance, the method that looks most appealing to me is:

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I am willing to practice with this (or any other method I end up liking better)  
this many times before the next appointment: \_\_\_\_\_

Again, don't worry if you don't reach your target. We're not aiming for perfection, just for trying our best. Whatever happens, come to the next appointment, where we will be talking about the part of you that is able to notice your thoughts and feelings.

## Module 3: Past, Future & Present



### Eating One Raisin: A First Taste of Mindfulness

#### Holding

First, take a raisin and hold it in the palm of your hand or between your finger and thumb. Focusing on it, imagine that you've just dropped in from Mars and have never seen an object like this before in your life.

#### Seeing

Take time to really see it; gaze at the raisin with care and full attention. Let your eyes explore every part of it, examining the highlights where the light shines, the darker hollows, the folds and ridges, and any asymmetries or unique features.

#### Touching

Turn the raisin over between your fingers, exploring its texture, maybe with your eyes closed if that enhances your sense of touch.

#### Smelling

Holding the raisin beneath your nose, with each inhalation drink in any smell, aroma, or fragrance that may arise, noticing as you do this anything interesting that may be happening in your mouth or stomach.

#### Placing

Now slowly bring the raisin up to your lips, noticing how your hand and arm know exactly how and where to position it. Gently place the object in the mouth, without chewing, noticing how it gets into the mouth in the first place. Spend a few moments exploring the sensations of having it in your mouth, exploring it with your tongue.

#### Tasting

When you are ready, prepare to chew the raisin, noticing how and where it needs to be for chewing. Then, very consciously, take one or two bites into it and notice what happens in the aftermath, experiencing any waves of taste that emanate from it as you continue chewing. Without swallowing yet, notice the bare sensations of taste and texture in the mouth and how these may change over time, moment by moment, as well as any changes in the object itself.

#### Swallowing

When you feel ready to swallow the raisin, see if you can first detect the intention to swallow as it comes up, so that even this is experienced consciously before you actually swallow the raisin.

#### Following

Finally, see if you can feel what is left of the raisin moving down into your stomach, and sense how the body as a whole is feeling after completing this exercise in mindful eating.<sup>1</sup>

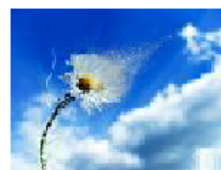
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<sup>1</sup> Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn (2007). *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*. New York: Guilford Press.

## Module 3: Past, Future & Present

### Mindful Breathing

The primary goal of mindful breathing is simply a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.



- ❖ Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
- ❖ Bring your attention to your breathing.
- ❖ Imagine that you have a balloon in your tummy. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath, and falling with the out-breath.
- ❖ Thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay, because that's just what the human mind does. Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.
- ❖ Likewise, you can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.
- ❖ You don't have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don't judge yourself for having them, or analyse them in any way. It's okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
- ❖ Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.

It's okay and natural for thoughts to enter into your awareness, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.



[www.gett.gg](http://www.gett.gg)

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/mindfulness.htm)  
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# Mindfulness Exercises



## Mindfulness Meditation

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Find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. To begin, you might want to set a timer for about 10 minutes, but after some experience you should not be too concerned about the length of time you spend meditating.

Begin by bringing your attention to the present moment by noticing your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and then leaves your body. Before long, your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. That's ok. Notice your thoughts and feelings as if you are an outside observer watching what's happening in your brain. Take note, and allow yourself to return to your breathing.

Sometimes you might feel frustrated or bored. That's fine--these are just a few more feelings to notice. Your mind might start to plan an upcoming weekend, or worry about a responsibility. Notice where your thoughts are going, and accept what's happening.

Whenever you are able to, return your concentration to your breathing. Continue this process until your timer rings, or until you are ready to be done.



## Body Scan

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During the body scan exercise you will pay close attention to physical sensations throughout your body. The goal isn't to change or relax your body, but instead to notice and become more aware of it. Don't worry too much about how long you practice, but do move slowly.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pressure, pain, or a breeze moving over your skin. Slowly move up your body--to your calves, thighs, pelvis, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and finally your head. Spend some time on each of these body parts, just noticing the sensations.

After you travel up your body, begin to move back down, through each body part, until you reach your feet again. Remember: move slowly, and just pay attention.



## Mindful Eating

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Choose a food you would like to practice with (preferably something you can hold in your hand without getting messy). Something as simple as a single raisin will work well. Move slowly through these steps, taking a moment to focus on each one.

Before you pick up your food, notice how it looks on the table in front of you. Notice its color, how the light reflects from its surface, and its size.

## Module 3: Past, Future & Present

# Mindfulness Exercises

Now, pick up the food. Notice the weight, and how the food feels against your skin. Roll the object between your fingers, or roll it in your hand, and notice its texture. Notice if it's smooth, rough, slick, soft, firm or if it has any other properties. Hold the food to your nose, and pay attention to its smell.

Next, place the food in your mouth, on your tongue, but don't eat it. Notice how it feels in your mouth. Does the texture feel the same as on your hand? What do you taste? Roll the food around in your mouth and pay attention to the feeling.

Finally, begin to slowly chew your food. Notice how your teeth sink into it, and how the texture is different inside. Pay close attention to the flavor, and how it spreads across your tongue. Notice how your body changes—does your mouth fill with saliva? Does your tongue feel hot or cold? Continue to chew your food, paying close attention to the many sensations as you finish.



### Five Senses

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Use this exercise to quickly ground yourself in the present when you only have a moment. The goal is to notice something that you are currently experiencing through each of your senses.

**What are 5 things you can see?** Look around you and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before. Maybe a pattern on a wall, light reflecting from a surface, or a knick-knack in the corner of a room.

**What are 4 things you can feel?** Maybe you can feel the pressure of your feet on the floor, your shirt resting on your shoulders, or the temperature on your skin. Pick up an object and notice its texture.

**What are 3 things you can hear?** Notice all the background sounds you had been filtering out, such as an air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars on a distant street.

**What are 2 things you can smell?** Maybe you can smell flowers, coffee, or freshly cut grass. It doesn't have to be a nice smell either: maybe there's an overflowing trash can or sewer.

**What is 1 thing you can taste?** Pop a piece of gum in your mouth, sip a drink, eat a snack if you have one, or simply notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it feels on your tongue.

The numbers for each sense are only a guideline. Feel free to do more or less of each. Also, try this exercise while doing an activity like washing dishes, listening to music, or going for a walk.

## Module 4: The Observing Self

### Step One

Using the Weekly Rating Sheet, please rate how well your life is working.

### Step Two

Looking back at the last module, this is how many times I was willing to practice connecting with the present moment: \_\_\_\_\_

This is how often I did practice: \_\_\_\_\_

This is the method or methods I used: \_\_\_\_\_

This is what the experience was like for me -AND/OR- These are the thoughts and feelings that got in the way of practicing as often as I set out to (ex. "I don't have time, this won't help, it's too difficult," depression, anxiety, etc.):

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## Module 4: The Observing Self

### Step Three

Main Ideas:

1. There is a part of us that thinks, a part of us that feels, and a part of us that is able to notice and observe our thinking and feeling.
2. We can call this part of us the Observing Self, the Noticing Self, the Watching Self, Pure Awareness, or any other name that makes sense to us.

→ Please watch “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Observing Self” [1:45]: <https://youtu.be/kl5cyCXelZc>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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3. This Observing Self is a safe place that we can learn to connect with at any time.
4. When we connect with our Observing Self, our thoughts and feelings have less impact on us.

→ Please watch “Underlying Calm” [1:14]: <https://youtu.be/F0WYFXxhPGY>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Connecting with our Observing Self isn’t about controlling how we think and feel, it’s about having the freedom to make choices that improve our lives.

## Module 4: The Observing Self

### Step Four

Practice new skills:

- Please choose one of the options below to help you experience the process of connecting with the Observing Self. Sometimes it is easier to understand something if you experience it, rather than have someone try to explain it to you in words. As you listen to the exercise, follow along as best you can with the instructions. Don't worry if you get distracted or lose focus. This is normal. Just refocus on the exercise as soon as you notice that your mind has wandered.

Option 1:

6 Minute Observer Self Exercise

Please click here: <https://youtu.be/fUZfjwL2H24>

Option 2:

Brief Observer Self Exercise (13 Minutes)

Please click here:

<https://portlandpsychotherapy.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/Brief-observer-self-exercise-13-minutes.mp3>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Module 4: The Observing Self

### Step Five

Between now and the next appointment:

- If you are willing, please decide how often you are willing to practice with the 6 Minute Observer Self Exercise or the Brief Observer Self Exercise (13 Minutes) and write your answer in the space below. It can be once a day, every two days, or just one time between now and the next appointment. You decide. Just try your best to practice as many times as you are willing. Don't worry if you don't reach your target. We're not aiming for perfection, just for trying our best. Whatever happens, come to the next appointment, where we will be learning how to take committed action to make your life better.

Between now and the next appointment, this is how often (or how many times) I am willing to practice the 6 Minute Observer Self Exercise or the Brief Observer Self Exercise (13 Minutes):

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## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### Step One

Using the Weekly Rating Sheet, please rate how well your life is working.

### Step Two

Looking back at the last module, this is how many times I was willing to practice connecting with the Observer Self: \_\_\_\_\_

This is how often I did practice: \_\_\_\_\_

This is what the experience was like for me -AND/OR- These are the thoughts and feelings that got in the way of practicing as often as I set out to (ex. "I don't have time, this won't help, it's too difficult," depression, anxiety, etc.):

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## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### Step Three

Main Ideas:

1. Values are what we care most about in our hearts. They are different from goals because goals can be completed and marked off a list, but values are always there to guide us. They are like points on a compass.

→ Please watch “The Values-Focused vs The Goals-Focused Life” [3:50]:  
<https://youtu.be/eiPxLpYlw4I>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Values are about how we want to *act*, not how we want to *feel* or *think*. There are no “right” or “wrong” values. We all get to choose what we care the most about in life, and we don’t all have to have the same values.

→ Please take a look at the handout “Reflecting on Your Values” for help with figuring out some of your values.



## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### Reflecting on Your Values

Below is a list of values. As you read through them, please circle the ones that are most important to you. Or, you may want to circle all the ones that are even somewhat important, and then go back and star the ones that are most important. There are many other values besides the ones listed here. We encourage you to list any other values that come to mind that you don't see on the list.

Remember, values are about desired, ongoing action. They describe HOW we want to live our life. They are not about accomplishing a specific goal or achieving a certain level of "success". We can't always control whether or not we meet our goals, but we can choose to act according to our values even if our goals are not met. In addition, values are about our own actions, not the actions of others. So, for example, if you decide that "Compassion" is one of your values, your focus should be on you acting compassionately toward other people and toward yourself, not having other people be compassionate to you (although that would be nice!)

|             |             |             |               |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Accepting   | Fair        | Leadership  | Respectful    |
| Adventurous | Forgiving   | Learning    | Responsible   |
| Assertive   | Freedom     | Loyal       | Safe          |
| Authentic   | Fun         | Mellow      | Skillful      |
| Aware       | Generous    | Open-minded | Spiritual     |
| Bold        | Healthy     | Optimistic  | Stable        |
| Brave       | Honest      | Organized   | Teaching      |
| Committed   | Humble      | Passionate  | Thoughtful    |
| Connection  | Humorous    | Patient     | Tolerant      |
| Consistent  | Independent | Peaceful    | Understanding |
| Contribute  | Interesting | Playful     | Wise          |
| Disciplined | Intimacy    | Powerful    | Other: _____  |
| Energetic   | Justice     | Reliable    | Other: _____  |
| Equality    | Kind        | Religious   | Other: _____  |

## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

3. Committed action means living in line with our values even when we have difficult thoughts and feelings.

→ Please watch “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: Values and Committed Action” [1:54]: <https://youtu.be/yoVmoOnjscM>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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4. It takes careful planning to set the right goals, and it often takes mindfulness and defusion skills to follow through on those goals in the face of painful thoughts and feelings.

→ Please watch “Demons on the boat - an Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) Metaphor” [4:46]: <https://youtu.be/z-wyaP6xXwE>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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### Step Four

Practice new skills:

→ Please take a look at “My Action Plan.” Begin by thinking of a *small* but specific goal that you would like to set. It’s best to choose one you can realistically accomplish between now and the next appointment, so we can talk about how things turned out.

## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### My Action Plan

Set a SMART goal (Specific, Meaningful, Action-oriented, Realistic, Time-specific): *Ex, Between now and the next appointment, I will call one friend and ask if they are available to meet for lunch next week.*

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This goal is meaningful to me because I value: \_\_\_\_\_

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These are the uncomfortable or painful thoughts and feelings I'm willing to make room for in order to reach my goal: \_\_\_\_\_

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If these uncomfortable or painful thoughts and feelings show up, these are some skills I can use to deal with them effectively: \_\_\_\_\_

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I am willing to take the first small step toward this goal on this day and at this time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### Step Five

Between now and the next appointment:

- Try your best to follow through on your Willingness and Action Plan.
- If you need more help, you may also want to read the article “Ten Tips for Motivating Yourself to Practice New Skills or Pursue Important Goals” by Russ Harris. Don’t worry if you don’t reach your target. We’re not aiming for perfection, just for trying our best. Whatever happens, come to the next appointment.

## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### Ten Tips For Motivating Yourself To Practise New Skills Or Pursue Important Goals

© Russ Harris 2013 [www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au) [www.thehappinesstrap.com](http://www.thehappinesstrap.com)

#### 1. *Link the Goal To Values*

Values can provide a deep motivation that helps to sustain the practice of new skills, or the pursuit of challenging goals, even when it's boring, tedious or anxiety-provoking (as it so often is). Ask yourself: is this really important to you? What is it that matters enough, that you'd even think about doing something like this? What values would underlie this course of action? How would doing this make a positive difference in your life? If we can link our new behavior to something personally meaningful, we're far more likely to do it!

#### 2. *Set Goals Effectively*

A wealth of research shows that if we set goals effectively, we significantly increase the chances of following through on them. A simple acronym for goal-setting is: S.M.A.R.T.

**S = Specific** What specific actions will you take? If a goal is vague and non-specific (e.g. I'm going to really be there for my kids this week) it's going to be hard to know if you have achieved it or not. So change it to a specific goal (e.g. I'm going to get home at 4pm on Friday and take the kids to the park to play basketball.)

**M = Meaningful** What values will you be living by, when you do this? If the goal is not meaningful – i.e. aligned with values – why bother? Either set a new one that is meaningful, or explicitly link the current goal to values, so it becomes meaningful (e.g. remind yourself “Doing this would be living my values of being loving and caring.”)

**A = Adaptive** How will this action be adaptive for your life (i.e. make your life better)? What are the likely benefits? If the goal seems likely to have more costs than benefits – then change it. For example, if the value is justice, and the goal is to “Punch anyone who treats me unfairly”, then clearly this is going to be maladaptive (i.e. make your life worse). Be clear about the benefits, and remind yourself what they are e.g. “Practicing this mindfulness skill will help me to handle anxiety provoking situations more effectively.”

**R = Realistic** Is the goal realistic for the resources currently available - which may include time, energy, money, physical health, social support, and so on? If not, modify the goal so that it is realistic for the available resources; or else put it to one side and make a new goal. (Of course the new goal might be to get the necessary resources for the original goal.)

**T = Time-framed** What day, date, and time will this occur, and for how long will you do it? A time-frame contributes to the specificity of the goal.

## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### 3. *Take Small Steps*

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. So if the goal seems too big, make it smaller. If ten minutes of mindfulness practice is too much, cut it back to five. If doing it daily is unrealistic, perhaps do it every second or third day, or weekly. Ask yourself: “On a scale of zero to ten, where ten is ‘I’ll definitely do this no matter what’ and zero is ‘There is absolutely no chance I’ll ever do this’ – then how likely are you to actually do this?” If you score less than seven, best to change the goal to something smaller and easier.

### 4. *Carrot Versus Stick*

Many people try to motivate themselves through being harsh, judgmental, self-critical, or punitive. But if beating yourself up were a good way to change behavior, wouldn’t you be perfect by now? Learn to “drop the stick”: unhook yourself from excessive expectations and harsh self-judgments, and instead practice self acceptance and self-compassion. Then “create a carrot” by linking your action to values, and reflecting on the likely positive outcomes. For example, ask yourself, “If I do this, what will I be standing for?” or “If I do this, what will the benefits be, in the long term?”

Acknowledge every little step “in the right direction”. Pay attention to what you are doing, and notice what difference it makes in your life. Find ways to reward yourself for following through. These rewards may be as simple as saying to yourself “Well done. You did it!”, or keeping a record in a journal, or reporting your progress to others who are supportive.

### 5. *Anticipate Obstacles*

When you commit to a goal, it’s helpful to ask yourself, “What might get in the way of that?” As the saying goes, “forewarned is forearmed”. So once we have identified obstacles to action, we can then plan how to get around them. And if there is no possible way around an obstacle? Then clearly we’ll need to set a different goal, and make room for our inevitable disappointment or frustration. Some of the most common obstacles to the intended course of action are activities that compete with it for time and energy. In such cases, we can ask ourselves, “What am I willing to give up, or do less of, or say ‘no’ to, in order to free up time and energy for doing this?”

### 6. *Confront the Costs*

Although the ‘carrot’ is far more useful than the ‘stick’, at times it is important for us to realistically and deeply connect with the costs of not following through. We may compassionately and gently ask ourselves, “If I keep on doing what I’m doing: What is it costing me, in terms of health/wellbeing/relationships? What am I missing out on? What will my life be like: one year from now? Two years from now? Ten years from now?”

## Module 5: Values & Committed Action

### 7. *Cultivate Willingness*

The practice of new skills is often boring or tedious; and the pursuit of goals that pull us out of the “comfort zone”, almost always generates significant anxiety. So if we are unwilling to make room for discomfort, then obviously we will not take action. So we can ask ourselves: “Am I willing to feel some discomfort, in order to do what matters?” or “Am I willing to make room for sweaty hands, and a knot in my stomach, and a tightness in my chest, and a voice in my head that tells me scary things, if that’s what I need to make room for in order to do the things that really matter?” This of course, overlaps with our first strategy: linking the goal to values. If you are unwilling to make room for the inevitable discomfort, you may need to a) work on acceptance skills; b) enhancing the link to your values; or c) setting an easier goal that elicits less discomfort.

### 8. *Defuse From Reason-giving*

The mind is a reason-giving machine, and as soon as we even think about doing something that pulls us out of our comfort zone, it cranks out all the reasons why we can’t do it, shouldn’t do it, or shouldn’t even have to do it: I’m too tired, I’m too busy, it’s not important, it’s too hard, I’m not good enough, I can’t do it, I’ll fail, I’m too anxious, and so on. And if we wait until the day our mind stops reason-giving, before we do the things that really matter in life ... we’ll never get started. So if fusion with reason-giving is a major barrier to action, then naturally we target it with defusion: e.g. “Aha! Here it is again. The ‘I can’t do it story’. Thanks, mind!”

### 9. *Enlist Support*

Social support is often hugely motivating. Can you find a partner, friend, relative, co-worker, or neighbor, with whom you can share his aspirations and achievements? Someone who will encourage and support you? Acknowledge your successes and cheer you on? Is there a group or a course you could join that might serve this purpose? Can you find an “exercise buddy” to go running with, or a “study buddy” to help you with homework?

### 10. *Use Reminders*

It’s very easy for us to forget what our goals are. So how can we create “reminders”? Can we put messages or alerts in the computer, mobile phone, calendar, or journal? Can we ask people in our support network to remind us? Can we stick up notes on the mirror or the fridge or the car dashboard? Can we put a sticker on our watch strap, or an elastic band around our wrist, or a gadget on our key ring, so that whenever we see these things they remind us of our goals? Can we use a recurring event to cue our new behavior: for example, we might do a breathing exercise for ten minutes immediately after dinner, or as soon as our alarm clock goes off in the morning? Can we schedule the activity into a calendar or diary or onto our daily “To Do” list – and highlight it in some way, to emphasize its importance? (This of course also gives the goal a time-frame, and helps avoid competing activities.)

## Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?

### Step One

Using the Weekly Rating Sheet, please rate how well your life is working.

### Step Two

This is how “My Action Plan” went for me -AND/OR- This is what I learned from the thoughts and feelings that got in the way:

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### Step Three

Main Ideas:

1. If we fall short of our goal, we have two choices:
  - A. Give up
  - B. Be mindful of our negative thoughts and feelings, learn something, focus on our values, and re-commit.

→ Consider these words by Dr. Russ Harris, from ACT Made Simple:

“When we do go off-track, what helps is being kind and accepting toward ourselves: we accept the painful thoughts and feelings, then reconnect with our values, and get moving again. What doesn’t help is beating ourselves up. I mean, if beating yourself up was a good way to change your behavior, wouldn’t you be perfect by now?”

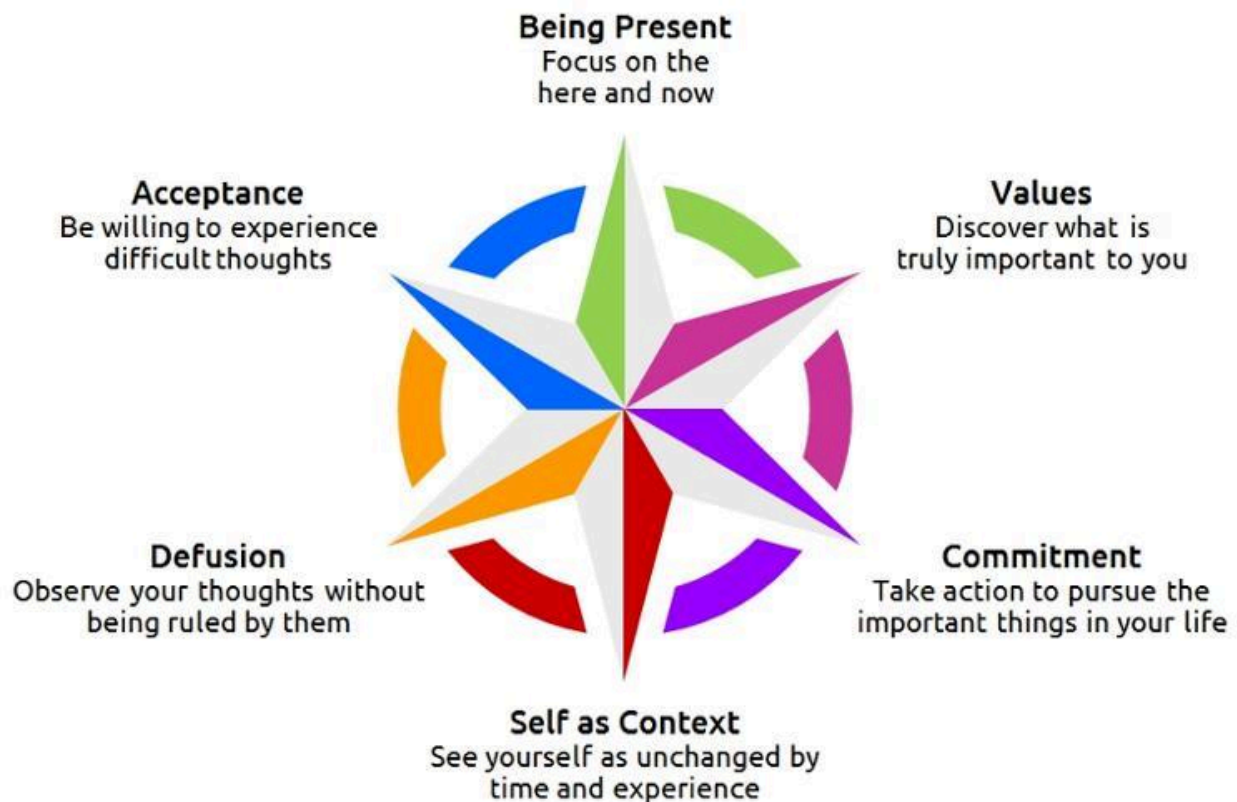


## Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?

2. All the skills you have been learning and practicing – mindfulness, defusion, connecting with the present, connecting with the Observing Self – have the same purpose: To give you the flexibility to make choices that improve your life. Remember, we aren't trying to control negative thoughts and feelings; that doesn't always work in the long run. Instead, we are trying to make room for our negative thoughts and feelings so that we can live a better life.

→ Take a look at the image below. This is a visual representation of the processes you've been working on in this toolkit.

### **Psychological Flexibility**



<https://headsted.co.uk/static/img/act/act-processes.jpg>

## Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?

3. You can remember these skills by remembering a very basic acronym for the word ACT:

A = Accept your thoughts and feelings, and be present

C = Choose a valued direction

T = Take action

- Please watch “Struggling with Internal Hijackers?” [3:28]:  
<https://youtu.be/NdaCEO4WtDU>

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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### Step Four

Practice new skills:

- Now that you have worked through these modules and learned some new skills, let us return to the Introduction to ACT exercise to put it all together. As I read the exercise to you, follow along as best you can with the instructions as I’m reading them. Don’t worry if you get distracted or lose focus. This is normal. Just refocus on the exercise as soon as you notice that your mind has wandered.

## **Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?**

### Introduction to ACT

Please find a comfortable position in your chair; one where you can stay relatively still for about 5 to 10 minutes. I recommend feet flat on the floor with arms on your legs or folded in your lap, but feel free to do whatever is most comfortable for you.

If you feel comfortable closing your eyes, please do so; or you can simply pick a spot in the room to focus on.

Take a few moments to mentally scan your body from head to toe... Notice if there are any areas of tension such as your jaw or shoulders... If you notice any tension, see if you can let some of that tension go... If not, that's okay, just notice what's there.

Take a few moments to connect with your sense of touch... Notice what physical sensations are happening in your hands... See if you can feel where your hands make contact with each other or with your legs... See if you can feel your feet on the ground...

Next, take a few moments to notice what you can hear... There may be several sounds, or just one, or it may be silent. Just notice whatever is there...

When you're ready, move your attention to your breathing... Watch the breath come in and go out on its own, without you having to control it... See if you can feel your breath in your nose or your belly...

As you breathe, you will notice that thoughts may come into your mind... They may be pleasant thoughts, or unpleasant thoughts, or neutral thoughts... This is what the human mind does, it is a thinking machine... Just see if you can notice the thoughts without getting caught up in them, and then return your attention to your breathing... Each time a thought pops up, notice it and then return your attention to your breath... This will happen over and over and over again, and that's okay, it means you're normal... With practice you can get better at noticing your thoughts, rather than getting carried away by them.

As you continue breathing, you will notice that certain feelings or emotions will also show up... Some of these may be pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, or neutral feelings... See if you can notice these feelings the same way you notice your thoughts... There is no need to try and change what's there, just try to notice what you feel... When you notice a feeling, see if you can locate where it is in your body... Notice what sensations come along with the emotion... There may be heaviness, lightness, warmth, coolness, tingling, or tension... You may find these sensations in your head, shoulders, arms, legs, or abdomen...

## Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?

Whatever you feel and wherever it happens, just notice what's going on and see if you can let it be...

And now see if you can return your attention to your breathing... See if you can notice that there is a part of you that's able to watch your breathing, watch your thoughts, watch your feelings, watch the sensations that happen in your body... There is a part of you that does the thinking and feeling, and a part of you that can notice the thinking and feeling... Take a few moments to experience what it's like to connect with the part of you that just notices...

And now take a few moments to consider what brought you here today... There is something you care so much about that you took steps to get here... Just reflect for a few moments about what it is that you really, truly care about most in your life... Recognize and appreciate the fact that you made a choice to take action for change... And as the exercise comes to a close, see if you can bring to mind an image of what kind of person you want to be when you are handling your pain effectively... Consider how you'll be acting toward other people... How you'll be acting toward yourself...

And when you're ready, slowly bring your attention back to the room and back to where we are now. If you like, move your fingers and toes around and have a nice stretch.

My Notes (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Module 6: Where Do We Go From Here?

### Step Five

Congratulations on completing this ACT-based toolkit! We hope you have found these new skills helpful in moving toward a life based on what you care about the most.

Going forward:

- Feel free to re-use this toolkit in whatever way helps you the most. You might want to work through it again and try new exercises that you haven't practiced with yet. Along with the tools and skills you have used thus far, you can find countless other resources on the Internet by searching online for Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Mindfulness, Defusion, or Present Moment Awareness.
- Remember that the most common obstacle to progress is not doing the exercises. With mindfulness and defusion skills, it is very easy to *think about* using them instead of *actually* trying them out. So if you haven't made as much progress as you'd hoped, consider if you are willing to do more of the exercises, do them more consistently, or do them more often.

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