

Mindfulness & Meditation: What is Mindfulness?



CAMERON L. GORDON, PH.D.

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

&

SOUTHEAST PSYCH NASHVILLE

615-373-9955

Research on Mindfulness



- **Benefits physical health**
 - Pain
 - Cancer
 - Heart disease and hypertension
 - Epilepsy
 - Arthritis
 - ✦ Through improved sleep and coping with stress
- **Benefits mental health**
 - Substance abuse
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Marriage & family functioning (parenting)

So, What is Mindfulness?



- **Awareness**
 - Intentionally focused
 - Oriented toward the present moment
 - Curious (some use the term “nonjudgmental”)
- **Mindfulness Meditation**
 - The formal practice of developing mindfulness skills
 - ✦ NOT stopping the flow of thoughts, emptying your mind, or demanding that you relax
 - ✦ Rather, focusing all of attention on one thing and noticing when it wanders
 - ✦ Coming into awareness of what is here now with open curiosity

The Power of Awareness



- Awareness Test:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSQJP4oPcGI>

- What we pay attention to, *and how we pay attention to it*, has a huge impact on our overall experience

- Barriers to mindfulness:

- Brain built to process massive amounts of data very rapidly
- Society encourages multi-tasking and divided attention
- However, many studies have now shown that we can train ourselves to be mindful with practice

The Present Moment



- Why so much fuss about the present moment?
 - It is the only moment we actually have!
 - ✦ Yet we spend most of our time in the past or future
 - ✦ This causes us to lose much of our actual life
 - ✦ This is also the cause of repetitive and fruitless suffering

The Present Moment



- Your mind's tendency to wander lays the foundation for your training in “gentle persistence”
 - When mind wanders, simply notice and bring it back
 - Moment by moment, over and over, gently but persistently bring your attention back to the present
 - ✦ Remember, it is *gentle* persistence – be on the lookout for struggle/violence/forcing your mind to submit and practice gently leading mind back to intention instead
 - Why should I?
 - ✦ This will strengthen patience, resilience, equanimity, etc., while creating a deeper contact with life!

Curiosity



- What does it mean to be curious in our practice of mindfulness?
 - Remain open
 - Approach experience without pre-determined impressions
 - Observing rather than trying to change the experience to be something
 - ✦ Think of mindfulness as a microscope - it is a tool to help you see things, not to intervene with them
 - Expectations set up a wrestling match with actual experience
 - ✦ Being curious gets you out of that battle
 - Why should I?
 - ✦ This promotes peace, insight, wisdom, creativity, etc.

Homework



- Practice mindfulness meditation daily
 - Set your duration (how long you wish to meditate) and your intention (what you intend to focus upon) before beginning
 - Intentionally incorporate present awareness and curiosity
 - ✦ Eating, breathing, listening, watching, sensations in body, etc.
- Start with brief (5 minute) exercises
- When mind wanders, gently and persistently bring it back
 - Remember, you ARE NOT trying to hold your mind still or produce deep relaxation – we are training in skills of awareness, curiosity, and gentle persistence – and that is all!



Thank you!

Cameron Gordon, Ph.D.
drcamerongordon@gmail.com