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Another Beautiful Life
COACHING

Exercising Mindfulness

Exercising Mindfulness is being purposefully present and aware of what's happening *as it's happening*. It's bringing an awareness and a focus to present experiences with acceptance. It's not ignoring, or avoiding, or resisting how you're feeling or experiencing a situation.

It includes Processing Emotions - allowing emotions by bringing awareness to them by owning them, naming them, and noticing them in our bodies. Mindfulness also includes Processing Thoughts by exploring the reasons for our emotions, understanding that they are trying to get our attention. We ask, "Why am I feeling this emotion? What is it trying to tell me? Where is it trying to move me?" Our emotions have a purpose, and when we understand this, we're able to attend to the thoughts that are bringing about the emotions in the first place with the goal of bringing in new perspectives and new mindsets.

We treat feelings/emotions by...

- 1) Resisting – "What we resist persists." Pushing them down, like a beachball under water. It takes effort & energy to hold it under water, but it's still there until it explodes up.
- 2) Reacting – All the actions out of the emotion: tantrums, fits of crying, yelling, etc.
- 3) Avoiding – You may not be aware of the emotion but are blind to it. You buffer to avoid it with something like an activity, overeating, drinking, etc.
- 4) Allowing – This is what we want to do with our emotions. You allow emotions by bringing awareness (as in "the watcher", the third party looking in) owning it, naming it, having compassion for yourself. Be aware of the emotion and breathe through it.

Why it's important to allow emotions:

Whatever is going on in the mind that you refuse to attend to will show itself somewhere in the body. When you "allow an emotion" it forces the emotion to move through your body and go away. Mindfulness and processing help to prevent inflammatory diseases, including heart disease, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, certain forms of diabetes, immune disorders, and certain forms of cancer. For example, stress is caused by the fragmentation of the mind. It's where the emotions of the primal brain and the logic and reasoning of the pre-frontal cortex are not integrated in an experienced event. So, stress from life experiences would make it more likely that you're going to have these inflammatory diseases if you've not attended to integration or defragmentation.

How To

Step One: Process the Emotions -

Sometimes you may be very aware that you *feel* the emotion somewhere in your body. You might feel the heat of anger in your face and tightness in your chest. You might feel sadness as a restriction in your throat. You might feel fear in the pit of your stomach. You might feel stress in the tightness of your neck and shoulders. When you notice the emotion in your body, do this:

- Close your eyes and breathe in and out a few times.
- Tap into that particular feeling, and notice where the emotion is in your body.

Notice...

- Does it have a shape?
- What is its size? Small? Large?
- Does it have a color?
- Is it spinning or moving?
- Does it move through your body? If so, does it leave one part of your body and move into another? Or does it consume different parts of your body as it moves?
- Breathe and sit with the feeling for a minute. Just let it be there.
- Ask yourself and let your mind answer: Why is your sadness here? What's the purpose?
- Notice if it's changing (shape, color, movement) or dissipating at all.
- Breathe.
- Give yourself compassion for the process.

Step Two: Process the Thoughts

After you've had a chance to fully allow the emotion - to just recognize it and let it be there without judgment - it's time to process the thoughts. We do this by bringing the adult brain into the moment with logic and reasoning that allows us to shift our perspective and see the circumstance from a different lens. This part of Mindfulness can reframe our stories and bring about new, more positive emotions.

Processing Thoughts is best done by writing them out on a piece of paper. Formulating thoughts, writing them down, and then using sight to read what you wrote all requires the pre-frontal cortex to be elevated and engaged. This is the logic and reasoning part of your brain that will integrate with the emotional brain and bring balance and clarity.

Start by asking yourself *why* you are experiencing that particular emotion. For example, "Why am I sad? What is it that has made me sad?" Notice that you will usually point to a circumstance as the source of your sadness. But the real source of your emotion is your thoughts about the circumstance. Write this on your paper.

Then ask yourself, “What am I thinking about (circumstance) that makes me feel (emotion)?” Explore all the different thoughts you have about the circumstance and write them down. Then read your thoughts back to yourself. Are you able to catch any lie-based beliefs? Can you identify any thoughts that are “half-truths”? Are your thoughts based on assumptions? With your logic and reasoning, go through each thought and reframe the story you’re telling yourself. What lies can you dispel with truth? What does your logic tell you about what you say you believe? Where could you bring sound reasoning to make sense of what you’re thinking?

Now, write out your new thoughts – your new perspective shifts – that have come so far. If you’re having trouble making a new shift in your thoughts, use a “Bridge Thought” to get your brain to pivot out of the old negative rut and consider something new. Try these Bridge Thoughts: “What if...” and “Is it possible that...”

For example, “What if it’s true that I’m not responsible for their hurt?” or “Is it possible that I can rebuild a new life and actually enjoy it?”

When you use Bridge Thoughts you are taking advantage of the fact that the brain is always trying to solve problems and answer questions. You’ve now posed new considerations about the circumstance, and it will get busy trying to create a solution to the question by proving it to be true. Your brain will gather and compound evidence that it is true and then will believe it to be so as indisputable fact. This is how the brain works. Knowing this empowers us to begin suggesting more helpful and positive thoughts for the brain to consider. We’re creating a bias on purpose. This is how we get our brains to work for us instead of against us.

Processing Emotions and Thoughts is integration or defragmentation of the mind.

Neuro-researcher, Dr. Dan Siegel, said, “Within integration of the mind, you actually alter epigenetic controls – that’s what the research shows. We now know what you do with your mind and what you do with your relationships changes the molecules of health. It literally changes enzymes. It literally improves your telomeres. It literally optimizes the non-DNA histones and methyl groups that are helping to prevent inflammatory disease.”

Understanding the efficacy of Mindfulness – Processing Emotions and Thoughts - empowers you to radically change the way you experience your life.

*For more information on Mindfulness, listen to Another Beautiful Life Podcast Episode 84 – Mindfulness Could Save Your Life.