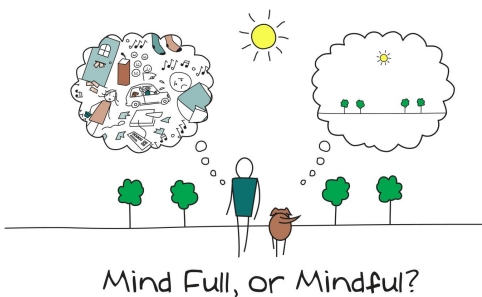




Mindful Tools for Stress Management Session 1: Being Here

We are faced with a challenge. Our wandering minds are constantly barraging us with thoughts and feelings. Our bodies report sensations and monitor our environment. This is useful up to a point but there is just no stopping it. We may try to empty our mind, numb it with substances and distractions or procrastinate the day away. But as Jon Kabat-Zinn writes, “[Wherever You Go, There You Are](#).” There is no escaping our wonderful and challenging human experience.



Kabat-Zinn defines **mindfulness** as “**paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.**” Mindfulness offers a different approach to our automatic habitual responses. One in which “we are aware of the waves and rest seated in the midst of them” (Kornfield). Instead of trying to *change our experience*, mindfulness teaches us to *change our relationship to our experience*. In doing so, we may **experience relief and calm even if our external circumstances don’t change much.**

Compelling research on **neuroplasticity**, our brain's ability to **reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life**, is demonstrating that mindfulness permanently changes our brains. Just as going to the gym strengthens our body, **mindfulness practice strengthens our brains**. In these practices, we get used to “failure”. We notice that we’ve become distracted and we gently return our attention to the present moment using our breath, our body, or another anchor. Ultimately, we will utilize mindfulness in our everyday experience. By practicing independently, we’ll be ready to act mindfully when confronted with real-life stressful situations.



Homework ~ Prioritize formal practice over reading whenever possible

Formal: Practice **every day** using the “Awareness” or “Body Scan” recordings. Visit www.yourmindfulcoach.com for links to iTunes, Stitcher or Soundcloud podcasts or email me. Consider setting aside the same 15-20 minutes each day. Experiment with the body scan both seated and lying down.

Informal: Count 1, 3 or 6 breaths when entering a car, answering the phone, preparing to eat or drink, etc. several times throughout **every day**. Consider putting a reminder on your phone.

Reading: Introduction, Chapter 1 (You Only Have Moments to Live) and Chapter 2 (Foundation of Mindfulness Practice). We’ll discuss the 7 foundations in Ch. 2 next time.