Teachers - try this exercise yourself and then with your students.

An Introduction to Mindfulness, Hanu & Ha

We can sometimes go for hours without paying attention—without really being aware of what we are doing. In these times, we aren’t fully present in the moment. Our thoughts can often be “miles away” without even knowing it.

When we are not aware, we miss out on paying attention to the smaller details in life. We are more likely to have knee-jerk reactions, behaving in ways that makes us feel more worried, angry or sad. By becoming more aware of our own thoughts and feelings, moment to moment, we gain greater control over our behavioral responses.

The point of mindfulness practice is to help us become more aware—to gain insight and clarity. When we’re aware, we respond to situations instead of reacting. We notice where our attention is and learn to focus it, over and over again. A good way to begin this is by focusing on our breath.

TRY IT: Mindful Awareness Exercise

- Sit down in a comfortable position
- Close your eyes and notice all the sounds that you can hear
- Concentrate on your breath
- If your mind wanders, that’s okay- Just bring your focus back to your breath, over and over again
- Breathe normally and feel your stomach rise and fall: focus on your breath … ‘hanu’ … inhale … ‘ha’ … exhale (in Hawaiian)
- Sit like this for at least three minutes
- When you are ready, gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to the room
- Allow yourself 30 to 45 seconds to bring your awareness back and sit with this new state of awareness
HINTS

- Don’t judge yourself when your mind drifts or wanders
- Just simply return to your in-breath and out-breath
- Remember, it takes repeated practice of mindful breathing (paying attention to the in-breath and the out-breath) before you can minimize the chatter in your mind, and remain undistracted from external stimuli such as noise.

REFLECTIONS

- Was it difficult to keep your attention on your breathing alone?
- Did your mind slip into thoughts of planning, remembering or feeling distracted?
- If your mind drifted, were you able to return your focus back to your breath?

If you answered yes to these questions, your response is perfectly normal. In fact, even the most experienced mindfulness practitioners face the same challenge. By practicing this exercise, however, you can begin to develop awareness of how often the mind transforms your present-moment experience—by adding memories (i.e., living in the past) or expectations (i.e., anticipating the future) to the actual experience. The trick is to recognize when it is happening and return to the present—simply by bringing the mind back to the breath and the present moment. Over time you’ll find this can increase your happiness and make learning easier.


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