

Mindfulness Meditation Group

Acceptance Week 6

Seeing and allowing things *as they are in the present* reduces energy drained by denying, suppressing, or resisting *what already is*. Acceptance frees and focuses our energies for positive change.



“Acceptance is not submission; it is acknowledgement of the facts of a situation. Then deciding what you’re going to do about it.”

-Kathleen Casey Theisen

“Accept your reactions and be present. There is a “you” that is always there observing and experiencing, and yet distinct from thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories.”

-ACT

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Acceptance journal exercise

What makes acceptance so difficult?

What things in life have been difficult for me to accept?

What am I currently struggling to accept?

How does this affect my life and my stress level?

Acceptance Body Scan Exercise

Make yourself comfortable. Gently close your eyes, relax your jaw and shoulders.

Focus on your breath, feeling it throughout your body.

Imagine that you are breathing in relaxation and allowing the oxygen to circulate throughout your body.

As you release your breath, imagine that you are breathing out tension.

Now turn your attention inward.

Notice the location and quality of body sensations.

Relax into these. Allow them to be. Study the qualities of these sensations, especially any constriction/looseness.

If you notice a thought, allow it without trying to judge or change it.

Become aware of the content of that thought and study the effect of the thought on your body.

If you notice an emotion or feeling, allow it without judgment.

Study how and where the body resonates with that feeling.

Take a few slow, deep, natural breaths.

Slowly and gently, as if a bubble were arising from a deep pool, allow a “resistance.”

To enter your awareness.

Let your attention and awareness rest lightly and gently on this resistance.

Simply hold this resistance acceptance struggle in a soft spotlight of awareness.

We are going to study its qualities, without judgment.

First, notice any body sensations that arise as you simply breathe in the presence of this struggle.

Breathe into these body sensations, without judgment, allowing them to express their energy.

Study them carefully, and notice any changes that arise.

Now notice any thoughts that arise in connection with the acceptance struggle.

Accept these without judgment. Let go of trying to change these.

Notice any effect, even subtle, these thoughts have on body sensations. Lightly scan your body to discover and locate the body sensations associated with the struggle. Breathe into them.

Next, notice any emotions and feelings associated with the resistance or struggle.

Notice the body location and body sensations associated with the feeling.

Notice what happens in your body and mind as you allow these sensations, thoughts and feelings to be, without trying to change or alter them. Especially notice any feelings of constriction or loosening, lightness or heaviness.

Finally, allow an internal word of blessing or peace or acceptance to arise and rest like a gentle warm, light-filled space, surrounding your struggle. Take a moment to set an inner intention to learn and grow from the challenges of life. Allow a moment of compassion for yourself and all of us, who are in this human condition together.

Mindfulness of Emotions

We often start to learn mindfulness skills by focusing our attention on our breath, our bodies, the environment or activities. Being mindful of emotions helps us to stand back from the emotion, understand it, not to fear it or struggle against it, and it can have the added benefit of reducing the distress (although the aim is to learn to accept the experience, rather than lessen the distress).

Set aside a few minutes when you can be quiet and won't be disturbed.

Start by bringing your attention to your breath. Notice your breathing as you slowly breathe in and out, perhaps imagining you have a balloon in your belly, noticing the sensations in your belly as the balloon inflates on the in-breath, and deflates on the out-breath.

Notice the feelings, and what it feels like. Name the emotion:

- What is it?
- What word best describes what you are feeling?
- Angry, sad, anxious, irritated, scared, frustrated...

Accept the emotion. It's a normal body reaction. It can be helpful to understand how it came about – what it was, the set of circumstances that contributed to you feeling this way. Don't condone or judge the emotion. Simply let it move through you without resisting it, struggling against it, or encouraging it.

Investigate the emotion.

- How intensely do you feel it?
- How are you breathing?
- What are you feeling in your body? Where do you feel it?
- What's your posture like when you feel this emotion?
- Where do you notice muscle tension?
- What's your facial expression? What does your face feel like?
- Is anything changing? (nature, position, intensity)

What thoughts or judgments do you notice? Just notice those thoughts. Allow them to come into your mind, and allow them to pass. Any time you find that you're engaging with the thoughts – judging them or yourself for having them, believing them, struggling against them, just notice, and bring your attention back to your breathing, and to the physical sensations of the emotion.

If any other emotions come up, if anything changes, simply notice and repeat the steps above. Just notice that the feelings change over time.

As you become more practiced, you can use this mindfulness technique when you feel more intense emotion.

Accepting Anxiety

We all hate being anxious. It's a horrible feeling, it feels overwhelmingly disturbing, and understandably, we try to keep it at bay by avoiding anything that might make us anxious, or by doing things that help us feel safer in those situations where we feel anxious.

If you're not willing to have it, you will.

Look at this sentence. What does it mean? "If I'm not willing to be anxious, I will be anxious?" What does that mean? Our mind might say:

"Hmmm. So if I'm not willing to be anxious, I will be anxious. I hate being anxious, so I guess I could give it a try. I'll try to be more willing to feel my anxiety so I won't be anxious"

Okay. But if you decide you could be willing to be anxious, in order to get rid of the anxiety, then you're not really willing to be anxious, and that will result in feeling more anxious!

This is not mumbo jumbo!
Read it again!

It sounds weird, not right. Yet it seems that it's true. If you are only willing to feel anxiety because you hope that by being willing to feel it, it will reduce your anxiety, then it cannot work. That is not the same as being willing to feel your anxiety.

Anxiety is normal. We all feel it. We will all continue to feel it at times.

To help start practicing willingness to accept anxiety:

- Notice when you start to feel the normal body response to unhelpful thoughts
- Don't struggle or fight with the feelings and thoughts, just let them be
- It will pass JUST NOTICE - This is just a normal body response to unhelpful thoughts. It will pass.....

The Science of Mindfulness Meditation

By Rick Nauert PhD

A fascinating new study by UCLA researchers combines modern neuroscience with ancient Buddhist teachings.

The scientists believe they have discovered the first neural evidence for why “mindfulness” — the ability to live in the present moment, without distraction — seems to produce a variety of health benefits.

When people see a photograph of an angry or fearful face, they have increased activity in a region of the brain called the amygdala, which serves as an alarm to activate a cascade of biological systems to protect the body in times of danger. Scientists see a robust amygdala response even when they show such emotional photographs subliminally, so fast a person can't even see them.

But does seeing an angry face and simply calling it an angry face change our brain response? The answer is yes, according to Matthew D. Lieberman, UCLA associate professor of psychology and a founder of social cognitive neuroscience.

“When you attach the word ‘angry,’ you see a decreased response in the amygdala,” said Lieberman, lead author of the study, which appears in the current issue of the journal *Psychological Science*.

The study showed that while the amygdala was less active when an individual labeled the feeling, another region of the brain was more active: the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex. This region is located behind the forehead and eyes and has been associated with thinking in words about emotional experiences. It has also been implicated in inhibiting behavior and processing emotions, but exactly what it contributes has not been known.

“What we're suggesting is when you start thinking in words about your emotions —labeling emotions — that might be part of what the right ventrolateral region is responsible for,” Lieberman said.

Mindfulness meditation, which is very popular in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, originates from early Buddhist teachings dating back some 2,500 years, said David Creswell, a research scientist with the Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA.

Mindfulness is a technique in which one pays attention to his or her present emotions, thoughts and body sensations, such as breathing, without passing judgment or reacting. An individual simply releases his thoughts and “lets it go.”

“One way to practice mindfulness meditation and pay attention to present-moment experiences is to label your emotions by saying, for example, ‘I'm feeling angry right now’ or ‘I'm feeling a lot of stress right now’ or ‘this is joy’ or whatever the emotion is,” said Creswell, lead author of the study, which will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Psychosomatic Medicine*, a leading international medical journal for health psychology research.

“Thinking, ‘this is anger’ is what we do in this study, where people look at an angry face and say, ‘this is anger,’” Lieberman noted.

Creswell said Lieberman has now shown in a series of studies that simply labeling emotions turns down the amygdala alarm center response in the brain that triggers negative feelings.

Creswell, who conducted the mindfulness research as an advanced graduate student of psychology at UCLA, said mindfulness meditation is a “potent and powerful therapy that has been helping people for thousands of years.”

Previous studies have shown that mindfulness meditation is effective in reducing a variety of chronic pain conditions, skin disease, stress-related health conditions and a variety of other ailments, he said. Creswell and his UCLA colleagues — Lieberman, Eisenberger and Way — found that during the labeling of emotions, the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex was activated, which seems to turn down activity in the amygdala.

They then compared participants’ responses on the mindfulness questionnaire with the results of the labeling study.

“We found the more mindful you are, the more activation you have in the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex and the less activation you have in the amygdala,” Creswell said.

“We also saw activation in widespread centers of the prefrontal cortex for people who are high in mindfulness. This suggests people who are more mindful bring all sorts of prefrontal resources to turn down the amygdala.

These findings may help explain the beneficial health effects of mindfulness meditation, and suggest, for the first time, an underlying reason why mindfulness meditation programs improve mood and health.

“The right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex can turn down the emotional response you get when you feel angry,” he said. “This moves us forward in beginning to understand the benefits of mindfulness meditation. For the first time, we’re now applying scientific principles to try to understand how mindfulness works.

“This is such an exciting study because it brings together the Buddha’s teachings — more than 2,500 years ago, he talked about the benefits of labeling your experience — with modern neuroscience,” Creswell said.

“Now, for the first time since those teachings, we have shown there is actually a neurological reason for doing mindfulness meditation. Our findings are consistent with what mindfulness meditation teachers have taught for thousands of years.”

APA Reference

Nauert PhD, R. (2007). The Science of Mindfulness Meditation. *Psych Central*. Retrieved on October 20, 2011, from <http://psychcentral.com/news/2007/06/22/the-science-of-mindfulness-meditation/910.html>