

Mindfulness when distressed



Mindfulness is really useful during distress but it is a skill to be practiced. Firstly we will look at what to do. There are 3 steps-

Observe- take time to notice the thoughts and feelings you experience. You are just becoming aware of what is happening. You do not need to judge the thoughts or feelings as there is no wrong way to be. Don't interact with them yet, you are just observing.

Describe- give yourself a quick summary of what is happening- I think, I feel, etc. Come to your conclusion about your experience. You will be right.

Participate- Accept these thoughts or feelings but still put yourself wholly into a positive or nice activity. Some breathe, meditate, listen to music, light a candle, play a videogame, go walking, etc. The activity doesn't matter, as long as it is meaningful enough to you that you can focus your attention on it. If the thoughts/ feelings come up again we non judgmentally observe and describe them and then return to what are are doing.

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While this is simple in theory it does take practice. The key 3 ways to practice mindfulness when distressed effectively are to be mindful-

Non-judgmentally- you are not offering any judgement of your thoughts, even if they go against your values. Acknowledge their presence, accept them and do nothing with them. Let them come and go naturally-

One-mindfully- Do one thing at a time. Acknowledge a thought, do a relaxing activity, etc but only one at a time. We don't need to really attend to the past or worries about the future right now, just what is going on in the present.

Effectively- there is no objectively right way to practice mindfulness when distressed. Do what works for you. There is a lot written about how to do mindfulness or distress tolerance "correctly" but in truth it is whatever works for each person. Big nature hikes or hour long meditations are great for those that find them helpful. But if you don't you aren't doing it wrong. An hour focusing on the TV or with friends can be just as mindful as an hour in the forest.