

Mind Yourself!

The intention is good, I decide to take myself out for a walk in the beautiful woods surrounding the village where I live, to refresh my mind and get some exercise. It's usually on the way back that I realise that I've hardly noticed my surroundings and have often been focused on the next activity in my day, thinking something along the lines of 'I'll just get this walk done and then I will go shopping'. Does this sound familiar?

Working using Cognitive therapy, during NLP, CBT and Hypnotherapy sessions in Hertfordshire and now Edinburgh, time and time again I see this approach to life exaggerated in client's with anxiety based disorders and depression. Specifically, individuals with anxiety and depression often struggle to appreciate the moment, as their attention is taken up with worrying about the "What If's" or re-visiting past events over and over again.

To give you an example, one of my clients attending NLP, CBT and Hypnotherapy sessions, Edinburgh, has recently overcome his fairly long held fear of having a panic attack whilst driving on main roads, using CBT techniques. This client had been using the journey to our sessions to develop driving confidence and had really made substantial progress in overcoming this fear, which until a few weeks before had been a big problem for him. When I enquired as to how he found the experience of driving to our CBT session, in Edinburgh, he realised that he hadn't been able to appreciate his achievement as he had been ruminating about an event some years ago, the whole way over!

The tendency to not live in the moment isn't only limited to people with anxiety or depression, as I regularly demonstrate to myself on my forest walk. However, living in the moment is something we can learn to do through the practice of mindfulness.

The practice of mindfulness, which has its origins in Buddhism, is now considered within cognitive therapy approaches, as a wonderful skill to be learnt to encourage relaxation and to stress proof your life. It is very helpful way of reducing anxious and depressive thinking. Mindfulness involves the purposeful direction of ones attention and awareness to staying with our experience in the moment.

For example, on my forest walk, to be mindful would involve concentrating on the colours and textures of the flora, the feel of the breeze against my skin, the patterns the clouds make in the sky, the sounds of birds and wildlife, or the way the ground feels beneath my feet. This purposefulness is crucial to being mindful. It allows us to fully experience and appreciate life in the moment, creating calmness.

All too often we proceed through daily life, only vaguely aware of our thoughts as they wander in an unrestricted way. For some, the mind can tend to indulge in anxious, depressive, self-pitying, angry or self-defeating thoughts, recreating and installing negative emotions. By practising mindfulness, and purposefully redirecting our attention towards our experience in the moment, you can learn to create space, calmness and contentment in your life.

Mindfulness can be applied to any activity from waking up, sitting in a comfy chair, brushing your teeth, breathing or eating. For example, when eating, being mindful would involve focusing on this activity without reading, talking or watching TV. Take time to really look at the colours and textures of your food, to notice the feeling you get from anticipating the taste. Also notice how the food feels and tastes in your mouth, the different flavours, temperature etc. A tip is to approach your experience as if it's the first time, with curiosity, getting rid of the "been there done that attitude".

Becoming mindful is similar to relaxation techniques in that it takes time to discipline our minds to remain in the moment, and practice is required. It's fine to start small with perhaps just five minutes at the start and end of each day and build up. It's certainly something that I am learning to do alongside my clients!

About the Author

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