INTRODUCTION TO MINDFULNESS

Principles of Mindful Awareness:

- Mindfulness is about living consciously; a practice of paying attention to the present moment in a purposeful and non-judgmental way.
- Mindfulness helps develop self-awareness and create space for intention.
- In general, we spend so much time thinking about the past or planning for the future that we can miss what is happening in the here-and-now. Out of necessity, we also tend to live our lives on automatic pilot, but often never learn how to slow down and pay attention to what we are thinking, feeling, or doing in the present moment. This decreased awareness of the present moment limits the ability to live to the fullest and to respond to situations with choice and intention rather than reacting automatically.
- A wandering mind is an unhappy mind.
- Like manual override, Mindfulness practice allows us to shift out of automatic habits.
- Mindfulness is finding the middle-ground between the extremes of excitement and dullness.
- Our optimal state of mind is a balance of being calm and alert.

Basic points of Mindfulness practice:

Choose an object or focus of mindfulness practice. We choose an object or phenomena to pay attention to, and remain with that object, regardless of how you think it is going.

In this practice, we generate attitudes of

- Non-judging
- Patience
- Beginner’s mind or curiosity
- Commitment
- Letting go

Practice # 1: Mindfulness of Breath

First object of mindfulness is the breath. The breath is always in the present moment and always available to us in our lives as way of bring ourselves back. It allows us to shift out of the busyness of the mind by dropping down into the body.

- Find a comfortable and stable seated posture.
• Begin by breathing in and out through the nose.

• Let the mind hover, watching the breath travel through the nostrils, pass the throat, and expanding the chest. Allow your belly to relax and breathe deeply into the belly.

• You can choose to focus on one aspect of the breath – the nostrils, the back of the throat, or the belly rising and falling. Choose the aspect and stay with it.

• Relax and be with the breath, when breathing in, know that you are breathing in. When breathing out, know you are breathing out.

• If it helps you can count the breaths up to 10, but don’t get caught up in the counting. Rest on the breath.

• Let it be enjoyable, don’t stress.

• Don’t worry if you drift off (this is natural and inevitable), just return to the breath when you realize you’re gone. Try to let go of the added and unnecessary critical thinking.

**Practice #2: Mindfulness of Body and Sensation**

Object of mindfulness practice here is the body and physical sensations.

• Start with the breath mindfulness

• Open the scope of awareness to include the physical sensations of the body

• Allow the awareness to hover on sensations

• When you become aware of any sensation in the body, see if you can simply observe it. You can label it as pleasant or unpleasant, but most importantly try to be with the sensation, rather than the judgment of the sensation.

• Be curious about the sensation, where does it start and end, what is the texture or tone of the sensation?

• Here we learn to accept and allow for pleasant and unpleasant sensations with a calm and alert state of mind without trying to run from it or get more of it.

• We practice an even and radical acceptance of what is.

• When you notice the mind wandering in different directions/distractions, gently bring the mind back to a hovering awareness of sensations and breath. Emotions, thoughts, etc. are considered distractions. Let go of any judgment; just kindly come back to the focus.