

What is Mindfulness?

(second of a series)

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“Mindfulness, a pathway to happiness, is full and open awareness of life, just as it is; in the present moment. Its cultivation can bring about ease, balance, insight, and wisdom.

Caregivers, frequently overlooked in many areas of healthcare and self-help support, have found Mindfulness, and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Training, to be of great benefit. The practices are simple, easy, and unencumbered by expensive equipment or pricey therapeutics.” So says, Chip Burson, Managing Director of the *HELIX Integrative Institute*, a company dedicated to bringing Mindfulness-based training to Healthcare, Addiction/Recovery, Education, Government, and Communities.

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally,” says Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. “It’s about knowing what is on your mind.” Dr. Kabat-Zinn is internationally known for his work as a scientist, writer, and meditation teacher engaged in bringing mindfulness into the mainstream of medicine and society.

The goal of mindfulness is to develop a relaxed, non-judgmental awareness of your thoughts, feelings and sensations. It is the experience of “living in the moment”, a practice known to reduce stress, confusion and the feeling of “running on empty”.

Based on his personal experience, Burson believes that “The practice of Mindfulness teaches one to develop a ‘one-moment-at-a-time’ awareness of thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and all activity in the immediate environment in the present moment”.

When applied to caregiving, being mindful will keep you engaged with your loved one so that they feel safe and not a burden. In this sense, mindfulness allows you to be nurturing in your role as caregiver, treating your loved one the way you would want to be treated if your roles were reversed.

Learning to focus on what we are doing in each present moment is a welcome antidote to disparate energy of the “monkey mind” so many of us possess. Multiple racing

thoughts are a waste of precious time and energy. Much like the White Rabbit in “Alice in Wonderland”, a hyper-vigilance on anything outside of the moment has us furiously running around in crisis and distracting us from truly living.

Many of us pride ourselves on our ability to “multitask”. Granted, it does have its place in the scheme of things, in terms of being flexible and able to switch gears quickly when necessary. However, constant multitasking is a surefire path to burnout and compassion fatigue.

“Moment to moment mindfulness helps one see that most of our thinking is either a rehashing review of the past, or imagined stories of what the future may bring”, reflects Burson. “We learn that we can return gently to the present moment and see things just as they are...in this very moment.

Mindfulness can be our constant companion and premier instrument, like a ‘new pair of glasses’ through which we see the world, ourselves, and others; and with which we can truly experience transformation as we bring better care and true peace to those we love.”

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