

Mindfulness and Letting Go

Trying to control or avoid worries or other negative thinking by answering back, chasing, or suppressing these negative thoughts can sometimes strengthen this negative experience rather than diminish it. Mindfulness is one way of skilfully disengaging from or letting go of negative thinking. This approach involves practicing how to notice when you are automatically drifting into negative thinking and then skilfully redirecting your attention back to the present, to the here and now. It may be helpful to think of this approach in terms of a radio. That is, imagine that the negative thoughts that drift into your mind as coming from a loud radio that is tuned to a station where the thoughts are very negative and seem to be shouting at you. The skill in mindfulness is not so much about trying to turn the radio off, but changing the way you listen to the radio. In this way the volume of the radio station can be reduced, and therefore seem less disruptive and distressing.

However, the important thing to remember is this is not a quick fix, it is not easy, and requires regular practice. The thoughts may still shout at you, but you are changing the way

you listen. Begin with the formal practice described in this information sheet. Just like any skill, such as learning a musical instrument, you need to practice, practice, practice! By practicing daily you may eventually become better at letting go, and be able to do things in a more informal way.

Steps for Letting Go

To begin, it may be best to start by practicing with minor concerns before moving onto major worries or negative thoughts.

1) To begin the practice, sit down in a chair and adopt a relaxed and alert posture, then ask yourself, what am I experiencing right now? What thoughts are around, what feelings are around, and what body sensations? Allow yourself to just acknowledge, observe and describe these experiences to yourself, without trying to change them or answer the thoughts back. Spend 30 seconds to 1 minute just doing this.

2) Now bringing your focus of awareness to your breath, focusing on the sensations of your breath as it moves back and forth in your belly.

Binding your awareness to the back-and-forth movements of the sensations in your belly from moment to moment, and letting all thoughts go. Maybe say to yourself 'relax' or 'let go' on each outward breath. Spend about 30 seconds to 1 minute doing this.

3) Now expanding your awareness to sensing your whole-body breathing, being aware of sensations throughout your body. If there are any strong

feelings around, maybe saying to yourself "whatever it is, it is OK, just let me feel it." Allowing yourself to breathe with these feelings, and if your mind wanders to bothersome thoughts just acknowledge and let go of these - focussing back on sensing your breath. Continue doing this for about 1 minute.

TIP: You can try increasing the time of steps 2 & 3 as you start to get more familiar with this skill.