



## Mindfulness

### Definitions

- Comes from the Sanskrit word: “Sati” which means mindfulness but also means awareness.
- General definition: “Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally,” Jon Kabat-Zinn.

### Stress and the Brain

- During stress, the limbic system (particularly amygdala) fires the flight, fight or freeze response.
- This response also simultaneously reduces neural traffic to the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls executive functioning, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking. It will also reduce the coding of information into long-term memory.
- A calm brain is a learning brain – When calm (hopeful, happy), the brain produces dopamine, which is needed for higher-order thinking and executive functioning. This is the oil that makes the engine go. Take care of the limbic system first, by calming and slowing down, then the prefrontal cortex will follow.
- Dan Siegel’s Hand Model of the Brain:  
[http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/everyday\\_mindsight\\_tools/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/everyday_mindsight_tools/) (scroll down to see video).

### Practice

- Focused attention – mindfulness meditation awareness without evaluation (don’t engage the frontal cortex). This practice notices sensory input, one sense at a time, to focus attention on one thing, shift areas of firing in the brain, and center awareness on the present rather than the past or future. Utilize a prompt such as a grape, orange, mint, etc.
- Deep breath – Reduce the response of the sympathetic nervous system and engage the parasympathetic nervous system that promotes relaxation, by deepening and slowing your breath. Even 1-2 minutes can change the way the brain is processing stress. Practice this sustained attention on your breath daily for best impact. Consider pairing with a sound or consistent routine in order to classically condition quiet focus.
  - Sit comfortably, relax jaw, shoulders, anywhere you sense tension. Notice breath coming in and going out. Feel your belly rise and fall, make core relaxed.
- Guided imagery – Put yourself in a place you have been before or one you create with your imagination. Take time to go through each of your 5 senses, focusing on each one in turn for 30 seconds to 1 minute to quiet the mind and focus your attention.
- Reflection on gratitude – give gratitude at the end of your practice for things in your life you are grateful for and gratitude to yourself for taking the time to slow down.



- **Websites with Guided Practice**

- Dan Siegel's Mindsight Tools, including breath work:  
[http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/everyday\\_mindsight\\_tools/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/everyday_mindsight_tools/)
  - 3 Minute guided mindfulness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDflnqo0TQs>
  - Headspace.com
  - Calm.com
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- Jon Kabat-Zinn: Body Scan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8oKWQiEWYs>
  - "Why Mindfulness Is a Superpower" video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4&spfreload=1>
  - "Where Does Compassion Really Come From?":  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4a66aFalME>
  - "Release" film and article: <http://www.mindful.org/middleschoolers-tame-anxiety-release-short-film/>
  - Book: Snel, E., (2013). *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness exercises for kids and their parents*. Boulder: Shambala Publishing. This book guides readers through a variety of mindfulness practices for different situations, from dealing with unpleasant feelings to getting ready for sleep. It comes with an audio CD. Please see Pook if you would like to borrow. S
  - Book: Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Delta Book. The book describes how mindfulness practice can be used to reduce stress and cope with illnesses and chronic pain. It centers on research finding from University of Massachusetts Medical Center's Mindfulness Stress Reduction Program.