

Instructions for mindfulness of thoughts

One of the key elements of mindfulness practise is to become an observer of our thoughts. It is our minds job to produce thoughts; this is something that happens automatically. In this mindfulness of thoughts exercise, you will learn that you cannot choose what thoughts come into your mind but that you can choose how much attention you pay to your thoughts. You will learn that you can notice a thought arising and that you can then simply learn to let this thought go.

In the mindfulness exercise you will be asked to become aware of any distracting thoughts that arise, to label the content of these thoughts and to redirect your attention back to the breath.

Mindfulness of thoughts exercise

Find yourself a comfortable, upright position, allowing your body to remain upright with your arms and legs uncrossed. You may like to allow your hands to gently rest in your lap. Allow your eyes to gently close. If you prefer, find a spot in front of you to focus your attention.

Begin by taking a few quiet, deep breaths. Begin to focus your attention on your breathing. Notice how the breath feels in the body. Become aware of the sensations in your body. Starting to relax your entire body with each breath.

Allow yourself to connect to your mind in the present moment. Notice what thoughts may be arising for you. Is your mind feeling focused at the moment? Perhaps your mind is a bit distracted. Simply take some time to observe the activity of your mind.

Whilst you are doing this, again direct your attention to your breathing. Try not to become distracted by your thoughts. Simply allow yourself to notice your thoughts and refocus your attention to your breath.

Thoughts will come and go, as it is the mind's job to produce thoughts, this happens automatically.

Pay particular attention to the content of your thoughts. Perhaps there is something that is reoccurring for you. Perhaps you have been having many different types of thoughts. Simply observing how the mind continues to produce thoughts for you to think about.

Notice the interpretations you are making about your thoughts. Notice how some thoughts may not make you feel anything in particular and that other thoughts, thoughts such as "I'm feeling bored" or "how much longer" may make you feel a little irritated or panicky initially.

If you notice that your mind is making such interpretations, simply label these thoughts as 'thoughts' or 'thinking' and turn your attention back to the present moment, to your experience right here and now.

Continue to do this. Refocus your attention to your breath. If any thoughts arise, simply observe that you have had a thought in an accepting way and label the content of the thought. You may like to label your thoughts with 'worry' or 'bored', depending upon their content.

Remember that your mind will naturally start to wander, if you notice that this has happened then simply acknowledge in an accepting and nonjudgmental way that this has occurred and gently refocus your attention to your breath.

Start to see your mind wandering as an opportunity for you do develop patience with yourself, to develop a skill of detaching from your thoughts and being curious about the minds' ability to produce thoughts.

Learning to create space with our thoughts, to not become consumed by our thoughts, learning to let them come and go.

Shortly, as this practise comes to an end, I invite you in daily life to continue to reflect upon the nature of your thoughts, as it will be important to be aware of your thoughts throughout each day.

Continue to be aware of the interpretations you make of your thoughts and how this can influence how you come to feel, and any sensations you may feel in your body.

Remember that it is the minds job to produce thoughts and that we can learn to simply let our thoughts come and go, in an accepting and nonjudgmental manner. Your thoughts are simply thoughts. We do not need to give them that much attention, we can simply observe that we have had a thought and return our attention to the present moment, through our breathing.

If you have had your eyes closed, I invite you now to gently blink your eyes back open and connect back to your surroundings, taking some of this mindfulness with you.