



Mindfulness Practice

As parents, we tend to spend way too much time worrying. We worry about the future. Are we setting our kids up for success?

We worry about the past. Did I handle that situation the right way? Did I screw my kid up for life?

Practicing mindfulness helps us to manage those thoughts by unhooking ourselves from them, accepting the thoughts, and then continuing to live in the present moment.

In this ebook, I am going to share metaphors from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy that you can practice any time and provide links for more resources.

None of these practices are my own invention, so be sure to reference these books and authors if you are interested in going deeper.

Take a few minutes to truly DO each practice. Read it. Think about it. Try it out. Notice how you feel. Share with the group which is your favorite, what you think of these!

Quicksand

When you struggle to get out of quicksand you sink in deeper.

When you try to stop and resist your thoughts, they often make it worse.

In ACT, we are instructed to be more accepting of life's inevitable struggles and figuratively spread out in the quicksand, not resist it. Paradoxically, the less they resist, the less they sink in the quicksand. As the saying goes, "What you resist will persist!"

Imagine you are in quicksand. Find your breathing and make your body lay flat. Float on top of the quicksand. It is still there, but when you stop struggling, the quicksand stops pulling you down.

With quicksand, there's only one option for survival. Spread the weight of your body over a large surface area – lay down. It goes against all our instincts to lay down and really be with the quicksand, but that's exactly what we have to do. So it is with distress. We struggle and fight against it, but we've perhaps never considered just letting it be, and being with the distressing thoughts and feelings, but if we did, we'd find that we get through it and survive – more effectively than if we'd fought and struggled.

The Mind Bully...practice by Russ Harris

The Mind Bully aka The Pit of Fear and Despair

The Mind Bully or Monster (of Anxiety or Depression etc) seems very strong and big. It says very upsetting things and tries to pull us into the great pit of fear and despair... so we automatically pull harder on the rope to stop us being dragged into the pit.

This tug-of-war is constant and exhausting. The harder we pull, the harder the monster pulls.

We feed the monster, and make it even bigger and stronger, by pulling harder on the rope.....by listening and paying attention to the monster, by believing the monster, and by reacting to the monster – by how we feel and what we do.

If we could let go of the rope, what would happen? The monster would still be there, saying what it says, but it would have no power to pull us towards the great pit.

As we stop feeding the bully, gradually he will get weaker, smaller and quieter.

Let go the rope:

- ✓ Notice and acknowledge the mind bully
- ✓ Don't believe everything you think!
- ✓ Shift focus of attention
- ✓ Do something else – mindfully (attentively)

The Beach Ball

We try to stop thoughts, but that's impossible.

It's like trying to constantly hold an enormous inflatable beach ball under the water, but it keeps popping up in front of our faces.

We can allow the ball to float around us, just letting it be.

So rather than stop the thoughts, we can stop fighting them, and let them be, without reacting to them.

The Train Station

Standing on the train station platform, sometimes we are advised to stand back as an express train will be passing through at speed. We hear and feel it approaching, thundering through as it buffets us with a strong blast of wind. We don't attempt to jump on the express train and let it take us to destinations we don't want to go to.

We can learn to notice the thoughts and feelings coming, and instead of jumping on that thought train, we can learn to stand on the platform, let it pass, and wait for the right train that will take us to where we want to go

The River

Sometimes it feels like we're being carried away downstream, struggling to stay afloat amongst all the mud, filth and debris.

That muck and debris are thoughts, sensations, events, feelings, and that river is our distress as we drift helplessly downstream.

But we can stand on the riverbank, watching as those thoughts, events, sensations, feelings go by.

You might watch individual items as they pass – perhaps a thought floating on a leaf, a sensation as a log, an event as an old bicycle.

We can stand and watch.

The Train Traveler

A train passenger sits in the corner of a carriage, quietly ripping up paper into small pieces and then throwing them out of the window.

Ticket collector: "Sir, why are you throwing pieces of paper out of the window?"

Passenger: "To keep dragons off the railway line".

Ticket collector: "But there are no dragons on the line sir".

Passenger: "Exactly!"

How is the passenger going to find out that throwing pieces of paper out of the window doesn't keep dragons away because there are no dragons?

The Poisonous Parrot

Imagine you're given a parrot. This parrot is just a parrot - it doesn't have any knowledge, wisdom or insight. It's bird-brained after all. It recites things 'parrot fashion' – without any understanding or comprehension. It's a parrot.

However, this particular parrot is a poisoned and poisonous parrot. It's been specifically trained to be unhelpful to you, continuously commenting on you and your life, in a way that constantly puts you down, criticizing you. For example, the bus gets stuck in a traffic jam, and you arrive at work 5 minutes late. The parrot sits there saying: "There you go again. Late. You just can't manage to get there on time can you. So stupid. If you'd left the house and got the earlier bus you'd have arrived with loads of time to spare and the boss would be happy. But you? No way. Just can't do it. Useless. Waste of space. Absolutely pathetic!"

How long would you put up with this abuse before throwing a towel over the cage, or getting rid of the parrot? We can often put up with the thoughts from this internal bully for far too long.

We can learn to use the antidote: notice that 'parrot' – and cover the cage. "There's that parrot again - I don't have to listen to it", and go and do something else. Put your focus of attention elsewhere. Be persistent in your practice! Eventually this poisoned parrot will tire of the towel, tire of you not responding. You'll notice it less and less. It might just give up its poison as your antidote overcomes it, or perhaps fly off to wherever poisoned parrots go.

The Walk of Life

When we are walking along the footpath, we tend to look just ahead of us most of the time, with occasional glances behind us and far ahead.

We look behind as we need to know of anything approaching from behind or to see where we have come from, and look far ahead to make sure we are heading in the right direction to get to where we want to go. Most of the time though, we need to know where we are putting our feet.

If we were constantly looking behind us, then we would be walking into obstacles or tripping over. If we were constantly focused on the far distance, we would slip and trip over obstacles beneath us. *(It can be fun to act this out!)*

So it is with life. Sometimes we are so focused on our past, that we neglect the present, and wonder why we keep falling flat on our faces. Or perhaps we are so attentive to anticipating dangers up ahead, that again, we trip and stumble our way through life.

The Reset Button

When we feel emotional, we can feel overwhelmed and our thinking brain (the pre-frontal cortex) goes offline – just like our computer does sometimes when it tries to do too many processes at once. To get our computers working again, we can either wait, or we can reset it.

We can use our mind's reset mechanism by telling ourselves to **STOP** and **BREATHE** – a little slower, in through the nose, out through the mouth. In thinking about our breathing, we have shifted our focus of attention and the emotional thoughts fade a little into the background.

In taking slower deeper breaths, we are calming our physical sensations of emotion. This reduces the emotion enough to allow our thinking brain to come back online, enabling us to make more rational responses.

Links & Resources

<https://thehappinesstrap.com/unhooking-from-difficult-thoughts-or-feelings/>

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>

<https://www.philosophyforlife.org/blog/ten-defusion-techniques-for-unhooking-your-mind>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsjSdM_tiYg

<https://youtu.be/Z29ptSuoWRc>

<https://youtu.be/206WtwEyqzg>

https://youtu.be/o79_gmO5ppg

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/metaphors.htm>