

## What Mindfulness is Not

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**Mindfulness is not trying to relax.** When we become aware of what's happening in our lives, it can be anything but relaxing, especially if we're stuck in a difficult situation. As we learn more about ourselves, however, we become less surprised by the feelings that arise within us. We develop a less reactive relationship to inner experience. We can recognize and let go of emotional storms more easily.

**Mindfulness is not a religion.** Although mindfulness has been practiced by Buddhist nuns and monks for over 2,500 years, any purposeful activity that increases awareness of moment-to-moment experience is a mindfulness exercise. We can practice mindfulness as part of a religion or not. Modern scientific psychology considers mindfulness to be a core healing factor in psychotherapy.

**Mindfulness is not about transcending ordinary life.** Mindfulness is making intimate contact with each moment of our lives, no matter how trivial or mundane. Simple things can become very special – extraordinarily ordinary – with this type of awareness. For example, the flavor of your taste or the color of a rose will be enhanced if you pay close attention to it. Mindfulness is also about experiencing oneself more fully, not trying to bypass the mundane, ragged edges of our lives.

**Mindfulness is not emptying the mind of thoughts.** The brain will always produce thoughts – that's what it does. Mindfulness allows us to develop a more harmonious relationship with our thoughts and feelings through deep understanding of how the mind works. It may feel as if we have fewer thoughts, because we're not struggling with them.

**Mindfulness is not difficult.** You shouldn't feel disheartened when you discover that your mind wanders incessantly; that is a natural function. It's also the nature of the mind to become aware of its wandering. Ironically, it's in the very moment when you despair that you're not mindful that you've become mindful. It's not possible to do this practice perfectly, nor is it possible to fail. That is why it's called a "practice."

**Mindfulness is not escape from pain.** This is the toughest idea to accept because we rarely do anything without the wish to feel better. You *will* feel better with mindfulness and acceptance, but only by learning *not* to escape from pain. Pain is like an angry bull: When it's confined to a tight stall, it will be wild and try to escape. When it's in a wide-open field, it will calm down. Mindfulness makes emotional space for pain.

*Cited: Germer PhD, Christopher K. and Sharon Salzberg. The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions. The Guilford Press; 1 edition (April 29, 2009)*