

18 bringing mindfulness to your anxiety

Have you ever been so nervous about a game that you forgot your equipment you needed for it? Or so worried about a test that you didn't notice you'd walked past your classroom? Have you ever seen an old cartoon where a character caught up in thought and worry crashes right into a brick wall? These scenarios show that when we are captive to anxiety we are often not paying attention to what is right in front of us. Staying in the present, we have to deal only with the present, not emotions and thoughts about the future.

Try this simple two-minute experiment. Find a spot without distractions, sit down, and do nothing for two minutes: no texting, no music, no TV, no fidgeting. You can set a timer on your phone, or you might even want to try the website <http://www.donothingfor2minutes.com>. Take these two minutes to just notice what is happening in your mind, in your body, and in the room around you.

What were your thoughts during these two minutes? And right now?

What kinds of emotions and feelings were you having during the time? And right now?

What did you notice in your body during those two minutes, and what can you feel in your body right now?

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How did you respond when distractions came up?

One of the most important parts of the practice of mindfulness is not judging ourselves for having thoughts. You don't have to like your thoughts, but try to let go of feeling ashamed of them. My favorite way of thinking about the mind is as a puppy that just wanders around in search of anything interesting, sometimes getting itself into trouble. What's the best way to train a puppy? It's not by making the puppy feel bad, but by gently picking it up and bringing it back to a safer place over and over again, with a patient smile on your face.

We start to learn about our anxiety by bringing mindfulness to it, or to certain triggers. We do this by paying attention to what is happening in our minds and bodies as we start down the path of anxiety.

Once again, sit still for a moment or two (it doesn't have to be a full two minutes this time), and take a few deep breaths to clear your mind. Remember, you don't have to like what you notice; just notice it. Take a moment now to bring your thoughts to the subject of school.

What kinds of emotions did you notice?

What kinds of thoughts came up?

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Did you notice any changes in your body or physical sensations?

Now bring your mind to friends and dating.

What kinds of emotions did you notice?

What kinds of thoughts came up?

Did you notice any changes in your body or physical sensations?

Now try bringing your mind to your family: parents, siblings, and other relatives.

What kinds of emotions did you notice?

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What kinds of thoughts came up?

Did you notice any changes in your body or physical sensations?

What are some situations that really get your anxiety going? Bring them to mind, and then write about what emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations come up with them.

Pay attention over the next few days and notice where your mind tends to wander. Are there times, places, situations, or people who trigger certain reactions?
