

# What Mindfulness is Not

## **Mindfulness is not trying to relax.**

When we become aware of what is happening in our lives, and within ourselves, it can sometimes be anything but relaxing. Particularly, if we are experiencing difficult circumstances.

As we learn more about ourselves, we become less surprised by the feelings that arise within us. We develop a less reactive relationship to our inner experiences. We can recognize and let go of emotional storms more easily.

Modern scientific psychology considers mindfulness to be a core factor in healing and general well-being.

## **Mindfulness is not about transcending ordinary life.**

Mindfulness is making intimate contact with each moment of our lives, no matter how "small" it may be. Simple things can become very special. Extraordinary "ordinary" experiences becomes more available.

This type of awareness enriches the flavor of food, the sound of music, relationships, and life in general.

Mindfulness is about experiencing oneself (and life) more fully. It is not about trying to bypass what is "ordinary" within oneself, or in life "as it is".

## **Mindfulness is not difficult.**

It is not necessary to feel discouraged when you discover that your mind wanders incessantly. That is the nature of the mind. It is also the nature of the mind to become aware that it is wandering.

Mindfulness develops the ability to step back and witness thoughts and feelings without being "hijacked" by them. This is called Metacognition.

It is not possible to do mindfulness perfectly. Nor, is it possible to fail. That is why it is called a "practice". Over time it can lead to a more balanced sense of well-being.

Mindfulness is natural.

### **Mindfulness is not about emptying the mind of thoughts.**

The brain will always produce thoughts. That is what it does.

Mindfulness allows us to develop a more harmonious relationship with our thoughts and feelings through a deeper understanding of how the mind works.

It may feel like we have fewer thoughts; because we are not struggling with them so much.

### **Mindfulness is not an escape from pain.**

This is often challenging to understand and accept. Because, we typically do things to feel better. Or, to escape from pain.

Mindfulness can change a person's relationship with pain. This shift can reduce the resistance and fear that frequently cause a great increase in our experience of "suffering".

Pain is like an angry bull. When it is confined in a tight stall, it will be wild and try to escape. When it is in an open field, it will calm down.

Mindfulness makes emotional space for pain. It can enable it to be experienced in a larger context.

### **Mindfulness is not a religion.**

Any intentional activity that increases moment-to-moment awareness is a mindfulness exercise. We can practice mindfulness as part of a religion; or not.

Adapted from the book, *The Mindful to Self Compassion: Freeing Yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions*, by Christopher K. Germer, Ph.D.