

Mindfulness + Acceptance = Stress Management

Mindfulness: The practice of being grounded, being in the present, in order to be aware of what you are experiencing such as emotions and thoughts.

Acceptance: Acknowledging that what you are feeling and thinking - is indeed valid - in order to be able to be in control of the situation such as being in distress.

Mindfulness Skill: Square Breathing

When you're stressed out or in distress, you are not breathing effectively and tend to hold your breath more often than not. The purpose of square breathing (taking deep breaths) is to release tension to your muscles and get oxygen to your brain in order to help you think a little bit more clearly.

1. Breathe in/Inhale counting to four (in your head)
2. Hold your breath counting to four (in your head)
3. Breathe out/Exhale counting to four (in your head)
4. Repeat three more times in one sitting.
5. Practice this several times a day even when you're not stressed to master the skill.

Acceptance Skill: ACCEPTS

A: Activities – Make time to find pleasure in doing the activities you enjoy such as playing tennis, running or knitting, drawing, watching movies with family/friends, etc.

C: Contributions – My personal favorite! Consider contributing to someone else and helping them out despite your own stress because it will make you feel better helping someone else. For instance, offer to babysit a friend's child or help out a co-worker who's in need or send a complimentary email for no reason.

C: Comparisons – The only time I want you to compare. It is helpful to look outside your own distress and compare to someone else who may have it worse than you such as someone who has family turmoil or financial strain that you may not be experiencing. This can help you feel better about your own stress.

E: Emotions – Increasing positive emotions by doing something unconventional. Try walking around smiling even when you don't feel like it and you'll get smiles back. I dare you to take 10 seconds and make yourself laugh for no reason! You can do this in the bathroom or at work. I guarantee you that others around you will at least smile or laugh with you (or at you!). All of a sudden, you will feel better.

P: Pushing Away – Know that when you're stressed out, it can be beneficial to push away the difficult task at hand or take a break from the stress and walk away. Don't send an email while you're upset in your stress. Take a break and come back to it.

T: Thoughts – Focus on thinking about positive things that get you excited / happy such as that vacation you'll be taking this summer or a vacation you just came back from. It can be focusing on things in your life that you look forward to doing such as watching your son's tennis match or an evening out with your significant other.

S: Sensations – Understand what is happening to your body when you're in distress. This is mindfulness here at best where you give your own body some attention and TLC in order to take care of yourself. This can include rubbing your temples, massaging your neck and shoulders, stretching out your arms, standing up and stretching your back. This is all to be in the present moment and watch out for physiological signs of stress.