

There is great power in mindfulness and the ability to hone in on the present moment. Below you will find a couple of ways to practice focusing on NOW.



One tool is to begin to recognize self-statements that drag attention away from the present moment. Of course, the first step is to identify when the focus drifts away from now or away from self-statements that are actually helpful. Imagine a CD player in your head. The goal is to recognize when the CD is playing something that takes you away from the moment, brings you to the past, and/or tries to predict the future. For many people, the statements often begin with 'what if'... Like, "What if I fail all of these tests? I failed all of them last year." Or, "What if I she makes me read that out loud?" "What if my Kayla knows I got a good grade and she didn't?" "What if my dad totally freaks out about this?"

'What if' statements take us away from the now and bring us to a very scary place. Imagine a terrifying Halloween haunted house filled with all the 'what if' situations. It is not a place that anyone would want to be. 'What if' brings us to places of fear, shame, sadness, and/or anger. This is not helpful. The goal is to recognize the pattern, pop the old CD out, and put in a new CD. The new CD is full of statements that are present tense, the thoughts are rooted in the moment, and they are 'What is' thoughts.

Hard to do? One way to get into the moment is to use your 5 senses. Remember that from elementary school? We see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. And, most of the time we aren't paying attention to all 5. Take a minute to identify what you see in this moment. What do you hear right now? What are you touching, what is touching you? What can you taste? Be descriptive and detailed in your observation. Take a deep breath and focus on this moment.

Do not expect to do this perfectly every time. There will be times when the old CD plays for awhile before you catch it. There will be times that you don't notice your 5 senses. Be gentle and grant yourself permission to build a muscle that is skilled at recognizing smell, taste, touch, sound, and sight. That muscle can also grow so that you are better at recognizing unhelpful thoughts. Practice developing these habits. When old CD thoughts arrive be kind, push eject, focus on your senses, and gently place the new CD in.

'What IS' not 'What IF'

**PRACTICE:**

Grab a pen and paper. Write down your 5 senses and what you are currently experiencing. Be detailed and specific. Next, draw a line down the middle of the page. In the first section write down some of the old CD thoughts that you have right now. On the other side write down helpful statements that take the focus away from 'what if' and direct attention to 'what is.' Practice this daily and reward yourself with self-statements like, "I am working on controlling my feelings. It feels good when my feelings do not control me."

*Example*

*MY FIVE SENSATIONS RIGHT NOW (Be Detailed and Specific):*

Sight: *I see the window. There are trees outside and they are blowing in the wind. I see the blue paint on the wall. It is flaking a little and it is pretty dirty. I see the clock on the wall. The second hand is moving. I see a poster that my teacher put up. It is hung with green tacks. It is a picture of a sunset. The sun is orange and the horizon is green and grassy.*

Sound: *I hear the clock ticking. The girl sitting next to me is drawing with a pencil and it is scratching on the paper. I hear a chair scooting on the tile. The door just opened and I heard first lunch music playing down the hall. I hear the person next to me sniffing like she has a cold.*

Taste: *I don't really taste anything. My mouth is sort of dry and I kind of taste mint from the gum I was chewing earlier.*

Touch: *I am touching the pencil I am writing with. The paper is under my wrist and it is smooth. I am touching the desk with my elbow and it is a little cold. My hair is touching my neck and it tickles a little. My feet are touching my socks and my shoes are touching the tile floor which is also smooth. I can feel my jeans touching my legs and it is a little scratchy.*

Smell: *I can smell lunch down the hall. It smells like hamburgers or something. The girl next to me has a cough drop and it smells like cherries and menthol.*

UNHELPFUL CD THOUGHTS (What If...?)

"What if I fail all of these tests. I failed them all last year?"

"What if I she makes me read that out loud?"

"What if Kayla knows I got a good grade and she didn't?"

"What if my dad totally freaks out about this?"

MORE HELPFUL CD THOUGHTS (What Is... present tense)

"I am trying my best and I ask for help when I need it."

"I am listening now and I am not making up stories about what might happen."

"I only control my thoughts and feelings. I can't control anyone else's thoughts or feelings."

"I am in this moment. I have a plan on how to calmly tell my dad about this."