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Think Outside The Box

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Being Present Here and Now

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The way we interpret situations is a significant contributor to our wellbeing. Our inner world is very rich, and when we are not in contact with what is happening there, we may be deprived of valuable insight.

Overcoming your fear of public speaking requires that you are in a contact with your inner world. That is why mindfulness is an excellent way to be in touch not only with what is happening insight of you but also to understand how your inner world interacts with the environment.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it are three quiz cards, each with a different image and title. The first card shows roller skates on a wooden deck, the second shows a fan of colored pencils, and the third shows a Ferris wheel at sunset. A 'See all quizzes' link with a right-pointing arrow is located at the bottom right of the banner.

EXPLORABLE
Quiz Time!

Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz:
Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz:
Flags in Europe

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What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness represents a mental state of focus, awareness, and openness. In other words, mindfulness is all about being fully present - here and now. This state of presence, allows us to engage fully in what are we doing at any moment and thus be less affected by anxiety. In this state, difficult feelings and thoughts have less of an impact on how we feel and act.

What Can Mindfulness Do for You?

When we are dealing with anxiety, a common strive is to make them go away, because they're unpleasant. But mindfulness lets us experience negative feelings and thoughts, while

in a safe space. In this way, you can remain in touch with the complete spectrum of your feelings and thoughts, without feeling the urge to deny them, or allowing them to overwhelm you.

Mindfulness helps increase self-awareness and leads to a more direct contact with both our inner and outer worlds. It allows us to be connected with all parts of ourselves, but also to establish healthy relationships with others. It, therefore, becomes easier to experience balance, peacefulness, and self-compassion. Instead of repressing or trying to get rid of negative feelings and thoughts, mindfulness allows them to be present in our experience, regardless of whether they are upsetting or not.

Mindfulness and Imagery

However, mindfulness is not about changing your state of mind. It's not a relaxation exercise either. It differs from the imagined rehearsal that you already know about. The latter allows you to project yourself into hypothetical future situations and come up with the best strategies for overcoming them. On the other hand, mindfulness requires being present here and now, without struggling with the content of our thoughts. You can use both of these techniques, as they are not mutually exclusive.

Features of the Self

When practicing mindfulness, it's important to be aware that there are two parts of our "self" or our being. One is so-called the Thinking Self - a part of us that is always contemplating, analyzing, creating presumptions about the past, present and future events. It generates all our beliefs, memories, judgments, thoughts, etc.

This part of the self can be affected by cognitive distortions. The content of our thoughts is a product of this self. The other self - The Observing Self - is responsible for attention and awareness. This part of our minds can become aware of the things we feel or think at any given moment, as it observes everything that is happening both inside and outside of us. Mindfulness helps us to connect with the Observing Self and to create necessary boundaries with the Thinking Self, so that we can reduce worry.

A Simple Mindfulness Exercise

This is a simple mindfulness exercise you can practice whenever your thoughts and feelings become overwhelming. It will help you get back in the present moment, rather than being stuck in past or the uncertain future. You can, however, perform it whenever you want and need; you don't have to wait for negative thoughts and emotions to emerge.

Take a break from what you are doing.

For example, if you are preparing for your public speech, take a few minutes for this exercise. Remember you can do it if you start to feel your fear or anxiety rising. Even if you are very busy, taking a few minutes out of your schedule to rest and recuperate can only make you more productive.

Close your eyes and take a deep breath.

Keep breathing and focus on each breath. Observe how the air enters inside of your lungs. Then notice how it swims away, as you exhale. Focus on your breathing for a few moments, while trying to take slow breaths.

With eyes still closed, hear the world.

Perhaps the sounds of passing cars are roaring right outside of your window. Or maybe you can hear the excited chatter of pedestrians on the street. Is the clock on the wall ticking? Observe all the sounds that are around you, and simply let them be present, without concentrating on any single one.

Observe your bodily sensations.

Start from your head. Is your neck relaxed or can you feel that it has tensed up? What do you feel in your chest? Is your stomach quiet? Can you feel your back? How does it feel when your legs are touching the chair and the floor?

Observe your inner sensations.

Do you have any thoughts? Or feelings? Don't attempt to chase them away, because the harder you try, the harder they will wedge into your mind. Notice them; let them pass through your mind, like cars on the freeway, and observe them, without engaging. Let them be present and then let them go. Don't allow them to guide you. Don't try to fight them - just observe them.

Stay focused on your feelings and thoughts as long as you want. Don't worry if your mind starts to wander - that is perfectly normal. Just let it wander and switch focus to your thoughts and feelings again.

Shift your focus to your body again.

Is your seating position comfortable? Can you feel your arms, legs, neck, and head? Focus on every separate physical sensation in your body, even if it is just for a moment. Notice all these feelings in the same way as you did at the beginning of the exercise.

Once again, notice the sounds around you.

Acknowledge them without attaching yourself to anyone in particular, and then go back to your breathing. When ready, open your eyes.

Don't Get Discouraged

What can you do with all the thoughts and feelings you noticed? Can they disappear into thin air? Perhaps not, but if you don't feed them with your energy and time, they will become weaker. Maybe they won't go away entirely, but practicing mindfulness will help you bear them.

At first, the exercise may seem vague, awkward, uncomfortable and difficult. However, with practice and acceptance - which you will learn about next - it will become much easier.

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