

## Mindfulness Instruction Guideline

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Our minds are very complex. Thoughts come and go, reminding us of tasks to be done, what we would rather be doing, and past events that we still have echoing and replaying in our thoughts. In earlier times, sensory input into the mind happened at a slower, much lower level, our minds learned to function well in this past environment. But today, our surroundings are much more complicated, the mind can adapt to this push to be more multi-tasking, but there is no push for it to learn to slow down. Thus, once becoming used to the accelerated pace, sometimes it does not want to slow down, or is never exercised or trained in the discipline of becoming quieter. Having a racing mind, or errant thoughts constantly visiting us, sometimes can detract from our enjoying the moment, or falling sleeping easily.

Mindfulness is an ancient practice. It can take different forms, but all lead to disciplining the mind. Some practices focus on the sensory, some focus on doing actions with deliberateness, and some focus on clearing the mind of errant, racing thoughts. As odd as it may sound, it is practicing a moment where you do nothing at all. And, as humans are greatly affected by thoughts, feelings, moods, and worries, this allows one to enjoy the environment of the calm, tranquil mind.

The type of Mindfulness outlined in this guide is the “Warrior’s Meditation”. It is practiced, achieved, by focusing on a candle. Fire, being an early ancient night time attention holder, is an easy item to focus on for extended periods of time. While focusing solely on the candle in front of you, three stages in ability to focus are pursued. They are listed on page two, following this introduction. To accomplish this exercise, the person is to place a candle in front of them, be seated comfortably, be free of distraction, and allow themselves anywhere from 5 minutes, to one hour to practice this technique.

It needs to be understood that, as simple as the technique seems, it actually takes time and practice to achieve. And once achieved, the student needs to refresh and practice the skill to retain this ability. But once learned, Mindfulness is hugely rewarding. It can replace pharmaceutical sleep aides, it can lower ambient anxiety and worry, and it can allow one to enjoy memorable moments in time, rather than them being cluttered and sidetracked by the errant thoughts of an undisciplined consciousness.

Know that in the candle exercise, it is good to have some sort of reminder; a trainer, a bell, a chime, some sort of timed indicator that may alert you about every five minutes to re-focus on the candle. As at first, the mind will wander away from the candle, and keeps its attention away, after mere seconds if not reminded to return. This “reminding to return” element is necessary to instill discipline, as soon the mind will expect to be confronted for its wandering.

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### ***First Stage: Not interacting with the entering thoughts***

When thoughts enter our consciousness like worries, anxiousness, opinions of what we see, we have a natural tendency to interact with these thoughts. Even unknowingly, we interact with them in a variety of ways. We can build on them, actively thinking about the thought in more detail. We can respond with actual anxiety and worry, or we can let the thought race, consuming our minds while we are eating, or trying to fall asleep.

In this stage the student must learn to create a kind of “corner chair” in their minds. Burrow a small mental place where one can sit and watch thoughts enter, stay for a while, and then get displaced by even newer entering thoughts. Like watching a close cloud passing by, it takes practice at first just to recognize that these thoughts can be ‘just observed’. And second, in this stage, one must resist the temptation to interact, or ‘get pulled into’ these thoughts as they may be near and dear; food, cherished activities, or loved ones. The purpose of this stage is to learn non-involvement with thoughts. As the first step, this can be a challenging stage.

### ***Second stage: Letting thoughts dissipate and evaporate***

This is learning not to explore thoughts or not give them mental attention. Not giving them a reason to anchor in our consciousness, the thoughts will soon fade. Although these ignored thoughts will fade, be aware they will be replaced quickly by other thoughts, sometimes by even more tempting thoughts.

During this stage, the skill, strength, and focus is to become comfortable with thoughts fading and leaving emptiness. This is a skill that only comes with time, and gets stronger once one sees that they actually do have a choice not to interact with any particular thought.

### ***Third Stage: active closing of thoughts through active focus on the candle***

This is the reward of Mindfulness, and this is where the strength is cultivated. When the mind clearly sees that it has a choice not to interact with a free-floating thought, this is when the mind realizes it can speed up the process by actively shutting the thought out. In a way, your mind “learns” an active way to silence the thoughts bouncing around errantly instead of letting them continue distracting.

This stage is strengthened by the ingrained impulse to returning the focus back to the candle. And, co-learned with this impulse is the active pushing out of distracting thoughts, necessary for focus. You soon realize how errant thoughts play such a big part in distracting us in our daily tasks. Soon, you will not even have to stare at a candle to push errant thoughts out. This is the value of Mindfulness; to train our minds to enjoy calm, undistracted focus.