

Mindfulness

If mindfulness is something that is new to you or perhaps something that you are looking to learn more about then hopefully this short document will be helpful to you. (It might also be helpful to read this document in conjunction with the 'Autistic Wellbeing - Where to get Support' document and the 'Mindfulness Activities for Children and Young People' and 'Mindfulness Activities for Adolescents and Adults' documents).

Mindfulness is a term that has been growing in popularity over recent years as understanding develops around the technique. During this current time, it might be more important than ever to consider how you can use mindfulness to enhance your own wellbeing. In this guide, we will explain what mindfulness is, how it can be of benefit and provide some useful tips that can be helpful to have in mind when practicing mindfulness.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a wellbeing exercise that can support you to pay more attention to the present moment, by centering and grounding yourself in the here and now. This can include becoming more aware of your own mental state, your breathing, your thoughts, feelings or the world around you. It is all about being directly tuned into yourself and /or your surroundings at a particular moment in time. To offer an example, you can practice mindfulness while you are out for a walk. You can do this by taking time to listen to your surroundings, the trees, the birds and any traffic going by. You can focus on the feeling of your feet against the ground and the breeze against your skin.

Can you smell or taste anything? You can engage your senses and focus on your breath, breathing in and out and emptying your mind of all thoughts. Thoughts will naturally come into your mind while practicing mindfulness and this is ok, you can acknowledge these but let them pass through and refocus on being in the moment.

Mindfulness is all about being 'present' in your body and in your surroundings. Mindfulness is a technique that can be undertaken in daily life, such as, while you are eating, during a walk or while you are sitting in your living room at home or in your garden. You can also set aside dedicated time to formally engage in mindfulness meditation, where you can focus solely on your own body and breathing.

Whilst you might need some guidance to learn about mindfulness, it is a free technique that you can learn to practice on your own, without any specialist equipment, in the comfort of your own home that can be supportive in creating feelings of calm and peacefulness.

To summarise, mindfulness can be thought of as your ability to focus inwards, to reflect on feelings, values and your ability to be fully aware and present in the moment.

How can Mindfulness benefit me?

We are all leading increasingly busy lives and the current Covid-19 outbreak has added another dimension and complexity that might be causing stress, fear and anxiety to many.

Autistic people might be particularly vulnerable during this time. Practising mindfulness can:

- Support good mental health
- Increase focus and concentration
- Aid relaxation
- Improve sleep

Mindfulness allows us to use focus to be 'present', it can be supportive in not letting fears and anxieties enter your mind and infiltrate your thoughts with things that you cannot control.

This is particularly relevant for the current situation we find ourselves in with Covid-19, as many people reading this may find this situation extremely challenging to cope with.

Hints and Tips

- Mindfulness is a technique that requires practice and effort - it might not be something that is easy for everyone
- Take things slowly
- Try to practice mindfulness at a regular time, building this into your daily routine, such as, just before bed or when you are out walking
- The more you engage with mindfulness, the more likely you will be to feel the benefit of it
- It can be helpful to log your practice, record and reflect on this to offer concrete evidence to yourself about how you are improving

Wherever you choose to practice mindfulness, try to prepare the environment. For example, if you are practicing mindfulness at home, switch off any distractions like the TV and put your mobile phone in a different room.

If you know other people who practice mindfulness or you have children at home, sharing your experiences together can also be beneficial and a lovely way to share and discuss how mindfulness is working for you.