

Hi. My name is Moira. I'm one of the counselors at the ANU Counseling Center. And I'm going to talk briefly about mindfulness.

Mindfulness is an ancient concept found in a wide range of spiritual and religious traditions. It is the awareness of what is going on in us and around us in the present moment. Mindfulness means being awake and knowing what you are doing. It requires stopping, looking deeply, and acknowledging things as they are.

Your mind is normally very active, generating a continuous flow of thoughts, sensations, and emotions. Mindfulness recognizes that this is how the mind functions. It does not try to stop your experiences, but rather offers ways to handle them effectively. It is a way of befriending ourselves and our experience.

Mindfulness is a process of awareness, not thinking. It involves paying attention to experience in the moment as opposed to being on autopilot or caught up in thoughts or other mental activity. We cultivate mindfulness by paying attention in a particular way. It has been described as paying attention to present moment experience with open curiosity and a willingness to be with what is.

How does mindfulness work? We experience everything through our mind, so by training and cultivating the mind, we can change the quality of our experience. Research has shown that mindfulness practice gradually alters the structure of the brain and new neuronal pathways are created which improve whole brain functioning. Mindfulness increases left prefrontal lobe activity, which is associated with happiness, compassion, joy, and curiosity. It also tends to reduce thoughts of anxiety, fear, and worry.

Research has shown that mindfulness has health benefits, such as reducing the impact of stress. Mindfulness can help us to become happier, kinder, more compassionate, and more aware of the needs of other beings. Over time, mindfulness can make us more aware of the consequences of our own actions or the actions of others.

We can use mindfulness to wake up, connect with ourselves, and appreciate the fullness of each moment of life. We can use it to improve our self-awareness to learn more about how we think, feel, and act. And we can use mindfulness to consciously influence our own behavior and how we respond to the world around us.

How can we develop mindfulness? Mindfulness can be practiced both formally and informally. The focus of your mindfulness practice can be the breath, the body, a sound, or a wish for others to be well and happy. Whatever you choose, it's important to integrate mindfulness practice into day to day life. There is no point being calm on the cushion but out of control throughout the day.

Mindfulness can be applied in every situation-- listening to others, cleaning the house, eating your meal, or

walking along the street. These are all opportunities for paying attention and being aware of the present moment with openness and curiosity.

I hope you this talking to has been helpful to you. If you would like to learn more about how to practice mindfulness, you can find information and access free guided mindfulness practices on the Smiling Mind Headspace websites. There are also free downloadable practices on the Mindfulness at ANU web page. And you can find further written information about mindfulness skills and everyday mindfulness on the Counseling Center website by following our mental health link.

Don't forget, too, that if you think you might benefit from a face to face talk with a counselor here at the center, just call 6125-2442 to make an appointment. Thanks for listening. And bye for now.