

Trauma-Informed Mindfulness and Meditation

When there has been a life changing event like a mass violence crime, it is common to relive conversations or experiences in the past and to worry about the future. This preoccupation can become stressful as events get replayed over and over in your mind.

Restore calm with mindfulness. Being able to find mental and physical calm is an important part of resilience. While there are many ways to restore calm, such as spending time with supportive people or doing something that gives you a sense of purpose and meaning, mindfulness can help you gain the ability to quiet your mind even in difficult situations.

Mindfulness has been described by Jon Kabat-Zinn as “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally.” It is being aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment. You are in the present moment, resting in the here and now, fully engaged with whatever you're doing. It is brought about by focusing one's awareness on the world around you or the feelings inside of you, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Staying calm and accepting strong feelings require practice. Accepting a thought or feeling does not mean you like it, just that you accept that it is happening. By pausing and observing the mind, you resist getting drawn into a spiral of negative thinking and become less reactive.

What does it mean to pay attention, be aware on purpose, without judgment?

Here are some examples:

- Awareness of the world: pause to become aware of the colors and sounds around you, as pure sensation.
- Body awareness: feel gravity on your body or to feel your toes, and notice any tingling, warmth or pressure, without judging it to be good or bad. It just is.
- Awareness of your own mind: notice your reactions and thoughts, with gentleness and compassion.
- Awareness of emotion: notice the sensations of sadness, anger or panic without judging them. Ride waves of feeling while being gentle with yourself.
- Awareness of others: listen attentively to what someone is saying to you, without judgments or opinions.

This takes practice. The good news is that you do not necessarily have to spend extra time in your day to begin to practice mindfulness.

You can get better at being present in the moment by doing just one simple activity, with purpose and without judgment. Several personal strategies you can consider to incorporate mindfulness into your daily life include:

- Listen to music fully, without thinking about other things
- Make a cup of tea or coffee and slowly enjoy it

- Exercise with intention and focus
- Walk to your car, noticing the world around you
- Eat mindfully, really tasting the food
- Step outside for several minutes and just “be” with the outdoors and with nature
- Listen and reflect in conversation with someone else
- Shower while engaging all of the senses (smell of soap, sensation and sounds of water, etc.)
- Take a meditation or yoga class

Meditation is deliberately setting aside time to focus and practice the skill of observing the mind and directing your attention. This leads to greater mindfulness. An example of meditation is sitting quietly for a set amount of time while noticing your breath going in and out; or saying a word or prayer over and over. When thoughts arise, return your focus to the breath or phrase. Many benefits of meditation occur naturally with continued practice.

- More relaxation and better sleep
- Better health and increased sensitivity to the body’s needs
- Increased awareness of surroundings and sensitivity to the world around you
- Increased ability to focus and complete tasks at work and at home
- Reduced stress from within – comparisons and judgments fade
- Greater compassion for others and more compassion towards yourself
- Increased sensitivity to others, especially children and loved ones

Tips for trauma-sensitive meditation

Meditation can help cope with trauma reactions. Meditation by itself isn’t a treatment for trauma reactions or posttraumatic stress disorder but, when used along with a treatment program or as a practice to manage stress once you’ve gone through treatment, it can be very helpful.

- If you have a history of dissociation or severe trauma, you may want to do meditation only guided by a trauma-informed teacher or counselor.
- When focusing on physical sensations, awareness of increased heart rate, pain or other sensations may remind you of a traumatic experience.
- Traumatic events can change your ability to comfort yourself and to control your emotions. It is important during meditation practice that you feel safe and supported.
- You always have the choice to stop until you are better able to bear the difficult emotions or intrusive thoughts. There is no need to feel bad about stopping at any time.
- Find a way to ground yourself when emotions run high. (See [Managing Distress: Grounding Tips](#))

Transcend NMVC Self-help App

This free app was developed by the National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center to help those who have been affected by mass violence. It is designed to help reduce the risk of developing problems and enhance personal recovery if you already have problems. It is available on the [Google Play Store](#) or [Apple App Store](#).

To learn more about mindfulness and meditation as they relate to people affected by mass violence crimes, see our [Mindfulness and Meditation to Support Resilience after Mass Violence guide](#).