

**Session 1: What is Mindfulness**

[Begin with explaining logistics and the structure of each session]

Now let’s talk about mindfulness. Mindfulness is a simple process of focusing on your breath, a mantra (which is a chosen word or short phrase) or, in the case of the visualization, the voice guiding your journey.

Your mind is designed to think so that’s what it is going to do. As you focus on your breathing, a mantra, or the guiding voice, thoughts are going to pop up into your head. That’s normal. That’s what your brilliant mind is meant to do. When it happens, and it will frequently, notice that you have had a thought and let it go. Watch it drift away like smoke on the wind, a cloud floating by, or like balloons lifting, up and away. Release your thoughts and return your attention to your breath, your mantra, or to your guiding voice. It’s a simple process but that doesn’t mean it’s easy. Just be patient with yourself because your mind is just doing what it is designed to do.

Let’s talk about the importance of mindfulness on your physical, emotional, and cognitive health.

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| Physical | Emotional | Cognitive |
| * Reduces blood pressure
* Improves heart functioning - Increases chance of surviving heart attack
* Cope better with chronic pain
* Improves sleep
* Alleviates gastrointestinal difficulties
* Reduces stress-related illness
 | * Improves mood
* Increases positive emotions
* Decreases anxiety
* Decreases emotional reactivity
* Decreases job burnout
* Reduces stress, anxiety, depression
* Reduces rumination
* Less emotional reactivity -Better able to disengage from upsetting stimuli
* Improved emotional regulation strategies
* Increased resilience after setbacks
 | * Increases attention
* Increases working memory capacity
* Better able to suppress distractions
* More cognitive flexibility
* Improved long-term memory
* Increased learning capacity
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With benefits like these, why wouldn’t you want to practice mindfulness? As we work through the program, we will explore how mindfulness creates these benefits. For now, I just want you to understand just how powerful a few minutes a day can be. That’s right, you don’t have to sit for long periods of time and in fact, you can engage in mindfulness while you are eating, running, or folding laundry. Mindfulness just involves being fully present and focusing on something in the here and now. We use breath awareness because it’s easy to count, giving your mind something concrete to focus on and you always have your breath with you!