



Simply Mindful
CANBERRA MINDFULNESS CENTRE



Mindfulness for mental health carers

1: Mindfulness to reduce stress & anxiety in challenging situations

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is *sustained* present moment awareness.

It is the moment-to-moment, non-judgemental, open-hearted awareness cultivated by paying attention.

The ability to be fully present to life as it is happening is an innate capacity we all have. Yet it can be difficult to sustain it for more than a few seconds, particularly when we're stressed or the present is challenging.

Mindfulness is valuable because the present moment is the only one in which we can act, create, problem solve, influence or change.

Mindfulness is a form of mental training

As we train our attention, with *a kind, non-judgemental curiosity*, we develop awareness of our mental, emotional and physical experience, our habits and our needs. With practice we develop greater capacity to meet present moment demands with more skill and awareness, even if the present moment is unpleasant.

Check in - how am I going right now?

Take a few moments to check in internally.

BODY - Right now, how does your body feel? What sensations are drawing your attention?

EMOTIONS - What emotions are here, if any? Are they mild or intense?

THOUGHTS - What kinds of thoughts are present? What's the state of the mind like?

BEHAVIOURS - What behaviours or impulses to act do you notice?

Having checked in, how would you rate your level of stress or distress from 0 – 10?

<i>Calm happy</i>	<i>ok</i>	<i>a bit unsettled</i>	<i>distressed</i>	<i>freaking out</i>
0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10				
Calm no distress	mild distress	moderate distress	high distress	extremely high distress
No stress	mild stress	moderate stress	high stress	extremely high stress

How mindfulness can help when we're stressed

When we're stressed or feel threatened, we very quickly move into fight/flight/freeze reactivity. It's not something we 'choose' to do, our body (nervous system) takes over. When the situation is not literally life threatening, it is not often very helpful to be in fight/flight/freeze.

- In fight, we might lash out, get angry, blame others or ourselves, feel agitated, anxious, hypervigilant
- In flight, we might literally run away or withdraw, avoid others, isolate, become silent, disconnect.
- In freeze, we might become extremely shut down, numb, feel completely zoned out and frozen.

The exercises below can help interrupt high stress or distress so we can calm down enough to think more clearly and respond rather than react to the challenging situation.

Mindfulness for Interrupting High Stress or Distress

1. Intense tensing and releasing (details below)
2. Intense exercise for a few minutes until you're puffed
3. Splashing cold water on your face or having a cold shower
4. Talking to a calm, safe person (tip – they have to stay calm for this to help)

Check in and notice how you're feeling right now, in your body, emotions, thoughts, behaviours. How stressed or distressed are you right now from 0 - 10? If you're 7 or above try one of these:

Exercise 1: Intense Tensing and Releasing

1. *Press your feet into the floor as hard as you can for as long as you can without causing an injury*
2. *When you can't press any longer, start letting go in the most gradual way possible*
3. *Be really curious about all the changes taking place in the body as you let go*
4. *Take a couple of deep slow breaths*
5. *Scan the lower body, is there anything you're still tensing or holding up that you could let go of a little more?*

Repeat with the upper body - *press your palms together or your arms back into the chair. Also engage your core abdominal and pelvic floor muscles, shoulders, face and neck muscles. Every muscle in the upper body tensing!*

Repeat with the whole body - *press your feet into the floor, your palms together, core abdominals*

Check in again. *How do you feel now? Rate your level of distress or stress 0 -10.*

Tip: *follow this up if you can with a calming exercise or activity like a breath practice, going for a walk, a hot bath, a cuppa, patting the dog, listening to calming sounds.*

Exercise 2: Square Breathing

Sit in a comfortable upright position

- *Settle your attention on the breath*
- *Gradually add a bit more to each in breath and each out breath:*

1. *Breathe In for a count of 4, out for a count of 4 – repeat a few times*
2. *Breathe in for 4, pause for 2, out for 4 – repeat a few times*
3. *Breathe in for 4, pause for 2, out for 5, 6 or 7 – repeat a few times*

Check in. *How do you feel now? Rate your level of distress or stress 0 -10.*

TIP: Do one of these exercises every day for a couple of weeks.

Why? Getting into the habit of doing it now will build the habit. If you don't practice it regularly, you're less likely to remember it when you need it!