

Model of Mindfulness: Intention, Attention, and Attitude

INTENTION

A clear intention helps you align with your deepest values. Your intention for practicing mindfulness might be reducing stress, increasing your sense of emotional and mental well-being, having a more peaceful relationship with your partner, or even upleveling your business. As you continue practicing mindfulness, your intention will help remind you why you are practicing in the first place.

- **Your intention isn't the same as a goal; it's the purpose behind your goal.** Let's say your goal is to lose weight. Your purpose for losing the weight could range from wanting a great body for your upcoming vacation to wanting to feel healthier and more energetic. Whatever the intention you set, it determines the energy behind everything you're doing—and will determine your outcomes.
- **A conscious intention creates stronger change.** When we act from unconscious intentions, our behavior and actions in the world tend to be just that: unconscious. But by acting from mindful awareness and conscious presence, we can set our intentions and choose our behaviors. In this way, we can make sure that our actions are properly aligned with our values.
- **Intentions may change over time.** You might begin your practice with a desire to simply take a break from the more stressful moments in your life. Over time, your intention could evolve, for example, into practicing non-judgment of yourself and others.

ATTENTION

You can think of attention as a flashlight that lights up the area you focus it on. You can widen your beam of attention to take in a bigger picture, such as a room, or narrow the beam to focus in on a single thing, such as a conversation with a person or the movement of your breath through your body. With mindfulness training, you can strengthen your ability to place your attention where you want it and keep it there for as long as you like.

- **Focused attention helps develop skillful habits.** We generally let our minds move from object to object, never resting for more than a few seconds. This kind of wandering attention is linked to impairments in memory, intelligence, and performance. However, when you notice your attention wandering, you have the opportunity to develop good habits. For example, if you catch yourself being judgmental about something you said or did, instead of indulging in those unhelpful thoughts, you can shift your attention to speaking constructively and kindly to yourself or to what's going well in your life instead.
- **You are not your mind.** If you are able to turn your attention to your thoughts, that must mean that “you”—the awareness observing the thoughts—are separate from those thoughts. In the words of Swami Sitaramananda: “If you think you are the mind, can you observe the mind? In order for you to observe the mind, you have to know that you are not the mind. You are not the thoughts. You are not the emotions.... Stay as a witness.”

ATTITUDE

Attitude determines how we set our intentions and how we pay attention to our moment-to-moment experience.

- **The impact of our default attitudes.** Our habitual ways of responding to everyday life have an impact over time. For example, many of us have habits of relating to ourselves in unkind ways. When we do this, it actually lights up the centers of the brain associated with physical pain, so what we may believe is a harmless thought is, in reality, deepening our relationship to pain.



- **Mindfulness requires compassion and positivity.** Relating to our experience with patience, kindness, non-judgment, and openness helps us transform our lives for the better and make healthier, wiser decisions. It literally wires our brains to be more joyful and compassionate.
- **This does not mean that everything feels good all the time.** It means that whatever arises, you practice holding it in a way that is helpful and doesn't make the experience worse. For example, if there's fear or sadness, you practice holding it with kindness and self-compassion—which helps reduce suffering and will, over time, make you kinder and more compassionate.
- **The attitude of beginner's mind.** With beginner's mind, you remember the reality that this moment has never existed before. Instead of getting caught in old habits, you are better able to respond to what's happening now in a fresh way.