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The Three A's of Mindfulness

Acceptance can be such challenging concepts to understand and practice, yet they are some of the most important concepts for us to remember, when considering living more mindfully. It took me a long time to realize that acceptance doesn't mean complacency, but rather deep care. Care for oneself, and care for the moment enough to be aware... to step back from our fight or flight emotion... and to recognize what is within our control and what isn't.

This is the core philosophy of mindfulness and a way to remember: the 3 A's, a framework I use to live mindfulness in my own life. Awareness — Acceptance — Action.

Awareness — is all about paying attention to both your circumstances and your internal reactions to them: physically, mentally, and emotionally. Notice what's going on without telling yourself what you're "supposed to" feel or how it "should" be.

Acceptance is seeing reality clearly, without sweeping anything under the rug, without saying "I don't want it to be this way." It's simply looking at the raw truth and saying, "yep, this is reality right now." "Yep, this is how I am reacting to it internally." You don't have to like it, you don't have to agree with it, and it doesn't have to be comfortable. But you have to SEE clearly, and sit with it, before taking action, otherwise, action is reactive, instead of responsive.

And finally, **Action** is about being skilled in the steps you take to move forward. The best way to do that, is to ask yourself, "Do I have control over this situation?" If the answer is yes, then plan out what to do and when/how to do it. If the answer is no, then move back into the practice of acceptance, and find healthy ways to cope (meditate!) with the mental and emotional turmoil that sometimes arises when life is not unfolding in the way we wanted.

Working with these concepts can help us live more skillfully and ultimately be happier, without as much resistance to the flow of life. Awareness — Acceptance — Action.

Write in a private journal about your experiences and thoughts around these concepts. Take time to pause and be reflective. YOU are worth YOUR TIME!



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4:8 BREATHING

This is my go-to stress relieving practice and the favorite practice of thousands of people I've taught. It is simple and powerful.

1. Sit comfortably and either close your eyes or turn your gaze downward.
2. Take full, deep breaths.
3. Inhale and fill the lungs to a count of 4
4. Exhale and empty the lungs to a count of 8.
5. Repeat.
6. Try to just breathe through your nose. You could choose to exhale through your mouth if it's more comfortable.

Practice for between 2 and 5 minutes to start. Work your way up to 10 minutes.

Variations:

- Elongate the breath: work toward eventually inhaling to 10, exhaling to 20, but don't force or push yourself.
- Add the ocean breath sound: this is done by practicing with your mouth open first, making a "fog the mirror" sound as you exhale. Next make the sound as you inhale also. Finally try to make the sound with your mouth closed, just breathing through your nose. In the yoga tradition, they call this ujjayi breathing. It helps you focus, elongates the breath, and trains your relaxation response to kick in.
- Add a breath hold
 - only if you are free from the following conditions: pregnancy, uncontrolled high blood pressure, COPD, heart disease, glaucoma
 - the hold might be just a pause, or the length of the inhale or exhale.



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Internal Awareness Practice

Remember that the point is to notice what's going on inside and let it be there. Allow yourself to be exactly as you are in the moment, without judgment.

Observe as if you were a scientist outside of yourself, simply and dispassionately noting what is present.

1. Sit comfortably and either close your eyes or turn your gaze downward.
2. Bring your attention to your physical body. Notice physical sensations, particularly any that feel distracting, like tension in the shoulders or jaw, sensations of soreness or injury. Try not to be reactive to these sensations, but just observe them.
3. If it's possible, soften around the sensations, letting go of mental resistance to what is present.
4. Now notice your energy level. In other words, are you tired, wide awake, or somewhere in between? Let go of judgment and story, just notice.
5. Notice your mood and emotions. Is there an underlying emotion present? Allow it to be there, acknowledge it, without judging yourself for it. Notice if there are sensations in the body that are connected to this emotion.
6. If it's possible, soften around any resistance to this emotion.
7. Notice what's going on in your mind. Are your thoughts taking you to something that's already happened? To ideas or stories about the future? To your to-do list? Try to unhook yourself from being in the center of your thoughts, and see if you can observe them, almost as if from the outside. Then practice letting them float by. Try to anchor your attention in a simple sensation like feeling your feet on the floor or your hands in your lap.



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Resources & Further Reading

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