



I Can't Concentrate Developing Mindfulness

Do you believe you can't study because you can't concentrate? Actually, concentration is a **SKILL** you can learn!

Is this what life is about?" These are questions that relate to spiritual wellness. You don't need to wait until you hit a midlife crisis to review your life. Taking time out to think about what lends meaning and purpose to your life each day and then taking actions to support the spiritual dimension of your life will help you live life to its fullest and feel good about what you have accomplished each day.

START BY LOOKING INWARD

Schools are teaching their students how to be in the present moment. This is what is known as mindfulness training, in which stress-reducing techniques drawn from Buddhist meditation are wedged between reading and spelling tests. Mindfulness, while common in hospitals, corporations, professional sports, and even prisons, is relatively new in the education of children. During a five-week pilot program at Piedmont Avenue Elementary, Miss Megan, the "mindful" coach, visited every classroom twice a week, leading 15-minute sessions on how to have "gentle breaths and still bodies." The sound of the Tibetan bowl reverberated at the start and finish of each lesson.

The techniques, among them focused breathing and concentrating on a single object, are loosely adapted from the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, the molecular biologist who pioneered the secular use of mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts in 1979 to help patients cope with chronic pain, anxiety, and depression. Susan Kaiser Greenland, the founder of the InnerKids Foundation, which trains schoolchildren and teachers in the Los Angeles area, calls mindfulness "the new ABC's — learning and leading a balanced life."

TIPS TO HELP YOU CONCENTRATE:

- Use good lighting
- Sit in a comfortable chair
- Turn off the TV and the
- Get enough sleep
- Do the hardest work when you're most energetic
- Hang "do not disturb" signs



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:

1. Teach your mind not to wander.

When you lose concentration, remind yourself: "BE HERE NOW." Focus back on your task. You'll probably have to do this over and over in the beginning...that's OK. Just "BE HERE NOW." Practice ignoring. Don't look for who just dropped lots of books, or at the wiggling person next to you. Create a mind tunnel between yourself and the task or the person to whom you are listening. Paying attention is a decision.

2. Plan your worry time.

Sounds odd, but works great! Schedule time during each day when you can think, worry, make lists, and focus on thoughts and concerns. If you slip into worrying or planning when you are supposed to be concentrating, put it on your worry list; then keep that appointment with yourself. Return to your task and "BE HERE NOW."

3. Get some air.

Breathe deeply from your abdomen, get up and move around, change your position intermittently. Keep your brain and body oxygenated.

4. Change the topic.

Switch tasks every hour or so to remain fresh and alert.

5. Keep your mind active.

Actually consider what you are reading, ask yourself questions about it, anticipate what your teacher will think is important about the information. Take notes.

6 . Unfreeze your body.

Sit in an upright but relaxed position. Check your muscles and body parts -including fingers and toes - and make sure they're not clenched.

7. Reward yourself.

Finished studying a chapter? Call a friend. Finished a written assignment? Read a chapter in a novel. Finished a term paper? Go out to dinner. Choose what works for you.

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Sources & further reading: Patrician Leigh Brown, In the Classroom, a New Focus on Quietening the Mind, New York Times, June 16, 2007. <http://www.ulifeline.org/main/factsheets/88>