

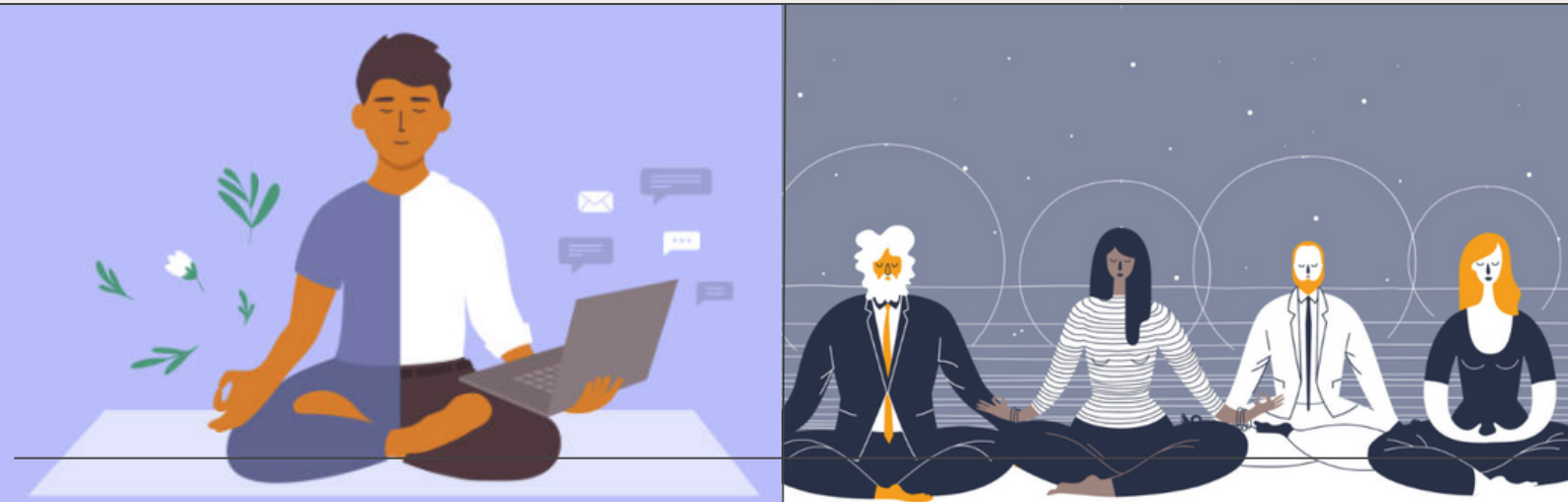
TU Dublin Student Counselling Service

A GUIDE TO MINDFULNESS

AND THE WISE MIND



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?



MINDFULNESS IS THE ACT OF CONSCIOUSLY FOCUSING THE MIND IN THE PRESENT MOMENT, WITHOUT JUDGMENT AND WITHOUT ATTACHMENT TO THE MOMENT. IT INVOLVES BEING FULLY PRESENT AND AWAKE IN THIS ONE MOMENT.

Mindfulness involves:

Intentionally living with awareness in the present moment

- Waking up from rote or automatic behaviours to participate and be present in our own lives

Without judging or rejecting the moment

- Noticing consequences, discerning helpfulness or harmfulness, but letting go of avoidance, evaluation, suppression or blocking the moment

Without attachment to the moment

- Attending to the experience of each new moment, rather than ignoring the present by clinging to the past or grabbing for the future

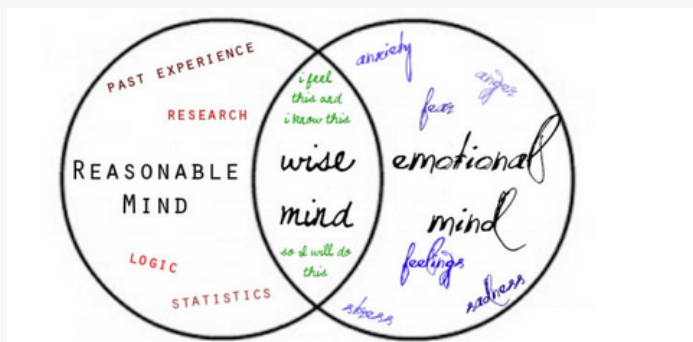


MINDFULNESS SKILLS: THE WISE MIND

What is the Wise Mind?

We all have moments when our emotions get the best of us. A lot of people also have moments when we ignore our feelings altogether and let logic guide our decisions. Wise mind is a term for the state when you can access your emotions and your logical reasoning.

“Emotional Mind” is the part of our mind that is dominated by emotions. We have an emotion, and that emotion tells us to act; we’re happy, and we sing. We’re angry; we hit something. It’s important to note that there is a difference between being in emotion mind and having emotions. The key difference here is whether your emotions are in control of your thoughts and behaviour.



Reasonable mind is the state of mind in which your emotions are not balancing out your logical thinking. Focusing on the facts and pragmatic aspects of a situation doesn't automatically mean you are in reasonable mind. However, if your rational thinking ignores the importance of your values and feelings, that's how you know you might be in reasonable mind. Like emotion mind, reasonable mind can also obscure your wisdom.

The wise mind is a meeting of emotional mind and reasonable mind. Wise mind occurs when a person considers both emotions and rationality. The more we reflect on what wise mind has to say, the more likely we are to do what works and be willing to tolerate any difficulties that arise along the way.



What is the Wise Mind?

If you've ever gotten into an argument about something that is very insignificant, there was probably a part of you that knew arguing about it was ineffective and that you should probably just let it go. That's wise mind.

As this example illustrates, there is a part of you bent on winning the argument (probably emotional mind) and a part of you that deems the argument unproductive (wise mind). You may not like what wise mind has to say sometimes, as may be the case in the example above, but you are still aware of what wise mind is telling you. It's always there. Sometimes, it just takes some work to find it and listen to what it's saying.

How can you know when you're using the Wise Mind?

Sometimes you may come to a decision, but you aren't sure if it's coming from your wise mind. After all, sometimes hearing your wise mind doesn't feel quiet and peaceful – especially if you don't want to do what your wise mind identifies as the best course of action.

You can ask yourself:

- When I made this decision, was I aware of the facts about the situation?
- Was I mindful of my feelings, wants, and needs about the situation?
- Was I aware of how my body felt when I thought about it?
- Did I breathe and listen to what my inner voice said about what will be most effective thing to do?
- Is the choice I made one that I will probably feel good about in the long-term, whether tomorrow or next month?

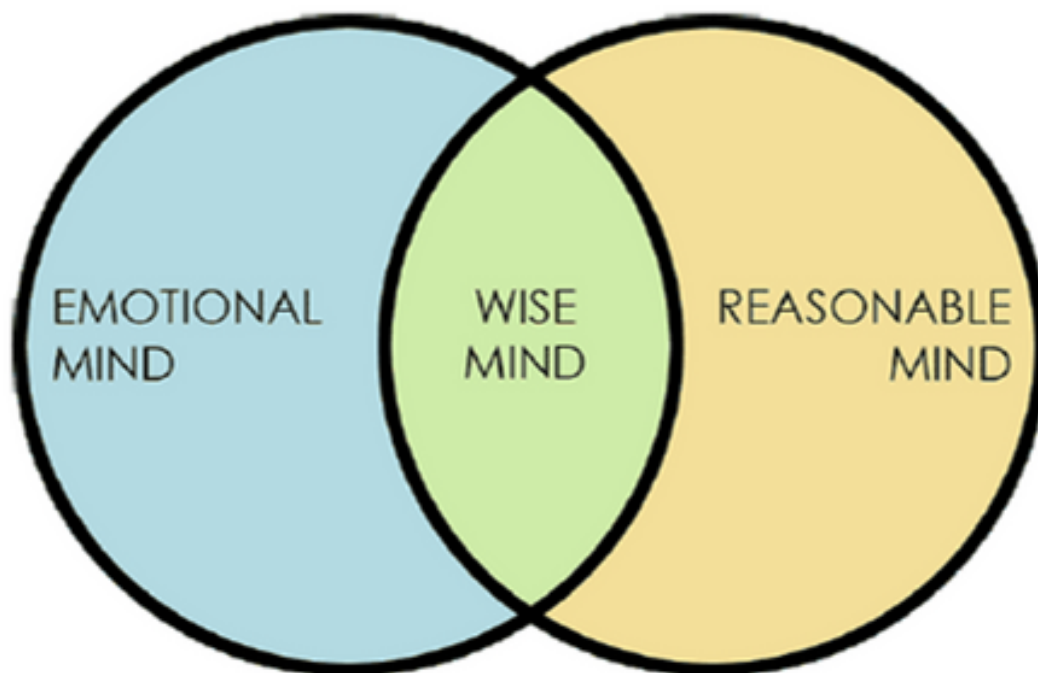
If your answer to all those questions was yes, then the chances are that you made a wise mind decision.



Wise Mind Practice

The Wise Mind

Your mind has three states: The reasonable mind, the emotional mind, and the wise mind. Everyone possesses each of these states, but most people gravitate toward a specific one most of the time.



The **emotional mind** is used when feelings control a person's thoughts and behavior. They might act impulsively with little regard for consequences.

The **wise mind** refers to a balance between the reasonable and emotional halves. They are able to recognize and respect their feelings, while responding to them in a rational manner.

A person uses their **reasonable mind** when they approach a situation intellectually. They plan and make decisions based on fact.

Describe an experience you've had with each of the three states of mind.

Reasonable	
Emotional	
Wise	



MINDFULNESS SKILLS: OBSERVE, DESCRIBE AND PARTICIPATE

People often experience times when they may wish that they did not experience strong emotion; however, it is important to recognise that emotions serve an important purpose. Emotions are the bodies way of signalling to us what is happening around us and within us. If our emotions become too intense, we find ourselves unable to remain in control, and on the other hand, if our emotions are blunted or we push them away, we are not able to access the messages and information we are being presented with.

Responses to our emotions may be primary (strong feelings that come on quickly, e.g. feeling surprised when winning a contest!) or secondary (our feelings about our feelings, e.g. if we feel angry and yell at a friend, we may then feel guilt as a secondary emotion to anger). Often, a primary reaction can set off a chain of events that cause more pain than the original emotion. For example, an individual may be left with feelings of guilt and shame following a binge eating episode.

Mindfulness can help us to build three skills that can support us in managing these strong emotions; they are Observe, Describe, and Participate. These skills can help us to remain in the present moment and prevent thoughts from spinning. These skills can also provide us with a window of time in which we can step back from an event or emotion, and observe it through the lens of a camera, or as a “witness.” We will prevent ourselves from judging an experience or emotion as good or bad, avoid getting caught up in the experience and quiet the talkative mind. This experience can be calming in and of itself. This cognitive “space” we have created makes room for healthy decision making and increased flexibility.



Observe:

- Start by noticing your environment and what is going on around you.
- Notice your feelings, thoughts and any bodily sensations without reacting to them.
- Non-judgmentally observe your emotional state (observe without trying to change).
- Avoid reacting to your emotion, simply notice it (e.g. I am feeling happiness or I am feeling anxious).
- Do not let the mind slip away, remain alert to each experience.

Describe:

- Use descriptive words to explain your experiences (e.g. my hands are sweating, my chest is pounding, my temperature is rising).
- Avoid engaging with the content of the thoughts, simply label them e.g. I am having a thought about X, I am having a feeling about X.

Participate:

- Remember to stay present in the moment
- Participate in whatever task you are engaged in; reading, writing, studying, etc.
- Focus only on that task.
- Avoid questioning yourself and how you are doing at the task. Do not evaluate yourself at this point in time.

Its important to bear in mind that these three skills should be done **one at a time**. You can only describe once you have observed, and you can only participate once you have observed and described.

Practice

- Imagine your thoughts are like clouds going by in the sky. Lie in the grass and watch them come and go.
- Imagine your thoughts are like leaves on a river. Sit on the bank and watch them float by but don't reach in and grab them.
- Do the dishes, noticing how the hot water and suds feel on your hands. Feel each dish as you wash and rinse it. Focus only on this task.
- Place one hand on a cool surface and one hand on a warm surface. Notice and describe the difference.
- Note how long you can observe for. It is common to have to start and restart the clock many times.



MINDFULNESS SKILLS: ONE-MINDFUL, NON-JUDGMENTAL AND BEING EFFECTIVE

The three skills of being one-mindful, non-judgemental and effective help to increase control of your mind and your emotions. They aim to support you in finding contentment in the present moment.

Unlike Observe, Describe and Participate, these skills can be done at the same time.

Focus on One Thing

This is also called being “one-mindful.” The idea of being “one-mindful” is to do one thing at a time. If you are going to eat, eat. Don’t read or watch TV at the same time. When you are talking with a friend, talk with your friend. Don’t try to be on the computer at the same time. The reasons for this are so that you can give your full attention to what you are doing and do your best job, but also so that you will feel completely present and not fragmented when you are doing these important things.

Mindfulness has to do with the quality of awareness that we bring to what we are doing and experiencing, to being in the here and now. It has to do with learning to focus on being in the present, to focusing our attention on what we are doing and what is happening in the present. Many of us are distracted by images, thoughts and feelings of the past, for example, worrying about the future, or being anxious about the present. It’s hard to put these things away and concentrate on the task at hand.

So being one-mindful is an effort to help us focus our attention on the here and now, to be able to absorb information and take part in the present. This can be a difficult skill for people to learn; be patient with yourself. Remember to observe, describe and participate.

Think about your day-to-day life. How often are you trying to do multiple things at once? How often do you only focus on one thing?



Non - Judgemental



We are very conditioned to placing judgments on our observations. We judge others and ourselves constantly. Judgment can create a hostile, negative environment. It can lead to shame, sadness, and guilt.

The point of taking a non-judgmental stance is to give yourself an opportunity to observe the same old things that you always observe in our minds or in our environment or about other people, but open yourself to thinking about it in a different way. So if you withhold your judgment about what your thought means, but simply observe it, note it, and let the thought move away, you have an opportunity to treat yourself more gently. Even if you still have the judgmental thought, you can observe that you had the thought, then let it go.

WHAT IS A JUDGMENT?

Internal judgments might be hard to recognise at first. The better you get at recognising them, the easier it will be to remove them. A judgment is basically putting an opinion, or a qualifier on an observation.

Observation = I notice that I am feeling sad.

Description = I notice that the corners of my mouth are turned down, my jaw muscles are tense, my eyelids seem heavy. I notice that I am tired and feel like I could cry. I notice that there is an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Judgment = Sadness is a bad emotion. When I am sad I am bad. Something is wrong with me because I feel sad.

Non-judgmental Stance = Sadness is an emotion. It is not good or bad. The fact that I exhibit the symptoms I associate with sadness does not make me a bad person. Experiencing the emotion is neither a good nor a bad thing. It simply is. It's okay to feel sad.

Possible results = When I judge the sadness, I am more likely to react negatively to it by acting out with destructive behaviour. When I do not judge the sadness, I am more likely to experience the emotion until it dissipates.

Think about the last time you experienced stress or distress. Think about your thought process at the time. Was there a self-judgement happening as part of that?



MINDFULNESS SKILLS: BEING EFFECTIVE

Being Effective

Being “effective” means focusing on doing what works, rather than what is “right” versus “wrong” or “fair” versus “unfair.”

Being effective is often allowing yourself to let go of the need to be or feel ‘right.’ It is letting go of feeling that you “should” do something or be a certain way; it is letting go of feeling that you “have” to do something or “must” be doing something.

These “should/must/have to” motivations often overshadow our ability to make decisions that may correct a situation. Being determined to be right, or feel it’s a matter of principle, or feeling that we “should” can be a very self-defeating goal. Letting go of these desires and instead doing what works is being effective.

For example, If you’re driving down the road and the driver of another car is trying to cut you off and move ahead, it is most effective to slow down and let the person move on. If you get caught up in the fact that you legally have the right-of-way and don’t allow the other car in front, you face the possible consequences of being in an accident or a victim of road rage. Does this mean you should always give in? No. It’s still important to maintain your self-respect. But you have to weigh the importance of the situation and determine whether it is worth your energy to prove you’re right. It’s all about economy of energy.

Effectiveness is often tied up with two things: one, realising that you don’t have to like the situation that you are in or agree with it, and two, realising and accepting that some things are out of our control. The most effective thing to do in these situations may be to let it go. Accepting the situation doesn’t mean you approve, just that you’re not going to make more work for yourself by fighting what you can’t change.

Think about the last time you felt stressed or distressed. What were your motivations at that time? Were there any “should/must/have to” statements happening for you?

What would have been effective in that moment?



MINDFULNESS SKILLS: USEFUL LINKS

Wise Mind

Stone Flake on a Lake: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fDTlBVJMUA>

Asking Wise Mind a Question: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZlqTZH8_I8&t=2s

Is this Wise Mind: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJf10xAhOYO>

Spiral Staircase Meditation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1tt9cEFUZI>

Breathe in Wise, Breathe Out Mind:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrsy8peVEGQ>

Observe, Describe, Participate

Mindfulness: What? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUSaQL1_zXE

One-Mindful, Non-Judgemental and Effective

Practice being Mindful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYdrMpnE93s>



PRACTICE

Mindful Seeing

Mindful Seeing is a simple exercise, requiring only a window with some kind of a view.

- Step 1: find a space at a window where there are sights to be seen outside;
- Step 2: look at everything there is to see. Avoid labelling and categorising what you see outside the window; instead of thinking “bird” or “stop sign,” try to notice the colours, the patterns, or the textures;
- Step 3: pay attention to the movement of the grass or leaves in the breeze. Notice the many different shapes present in this small segment of the world you can see. Try to see the world outside the window from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with these sights;
- Step 4: be observant, but not critical. Be aware, but not fixated;
- Step 5: if you become distracted, gently pull your mind away from those thoughts and notice a colour or shape again to put you back in the right frame of mind.

Thought Labelling

Try labelling your thoughts as thoughts (e.g., “I am having the thought that I’ll be too nervous to speak”) or label the type of thought (e.g., “I am having the judgment that my voice sounds weird” or “I am having the prediction that the salesperson will be annoyed if I return it”, etc.). This can help with recognising judgements when they happen.



PRACTICE



Mindfulness Meditation

Find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. To begin, you might want to set a timer for about 10 minutes, but after some experience you should not be too concerned about the length of time you spend meditating.

Begin by bringing your attention to the present moment by noticing your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and then leaves your body. Before long, your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. That's ok. Notice your thoughts and feelings as if you are an outside observer watching what's happening in your brain. Take note, and allow yourself to return to your breathing.

Sometimes you might feel frustrated or bored. That's fine—these are just a few more feelings to notice. Your mind might start to plan an upcoming weekend, or worry about a responsibility. Notice where your thoughts are going, and accept what's happening.

Whenever you are able to, return your concentration to your breathing. Continue this process until your timer rings, or until you are ready to be done.



Body Scan

During the body scan exercise you will pay close attention to physical sensations throughout your body. The goal isn't to change or relax your body, but instead to notice and become more aware of it. Don't worry too much about how long you practice, but do move slowly.

Begin by paying attention to the sensations in your feet. Notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pressure, pain, or a breeze moving over your skin. Slowly move up your body—to your calves, thighs, pelvis, stomach, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, and finally your head. Spend some time on each of these body parts, just noticing the sensations.

After you travel up your body, begin to move back down, through each body part, until you reach your feet again. Remember: move slowly, and just pay attention.



Five Senses

Use this exercise to quickly ground yourself in the present when you only have a moment. The goal is to notice something that you are currently experiencing through each of your senses.

What are 5 things you can see? Look around you and notice 5 things you hadn't noticed before. Maybe a pattern on a wall, light reflecting from a surface, or a knick-knack in the corner of a room.

What are 4 things you can feel? Maybe you can feel the pressure of your feet on the floor, your shirt resting on your shoulders, or the temperature on your skin. Pick up an object and notice its texture.

What are 3 things you can hear? Notice all the background sounds you had been filtering out, such as an air-conditioning, birds chirping, or cars on a distant street.

What are 2 things you can smell? Maybe you can smell flowers, coffee, or freshly cut grass. It doesn't have to be a nice smell either: maybe there's an overflowing trash can or sewer.

What is 1 thing you can taste? Pop a piece of gum in your mouth, sip a drink, eat a snack if you have one, or simply notice how your mouth tastes. "Taste" the air to see how it feels on your tongue.

The numbers for each sense are only a guideline. Feel free to do more or less of each. Also, try this exercise while doing an activity like washing dishes, listening to music, or going for a walk.



