

4 Mindfulness Exercises to Practice at Home

1. The Raisin Exercise

This is a great introductory exercise for beginners to start practicing mindfulness since it can be attempted by anyone with any kind of food (although one with an interesting or unusual texture, smell, or taste is best).

In this exercise, the facilitator provides participants with a few raisins and asks that they pretend they have never seen a raisin before. The facilitator then asks them to pay careful attention to:

- The way the raisin looks;
- How it feels;
- How their skin responds to its manipulation;
- Its smell;
- Its taste.

Focusing on the single object of the raisin is meant to bring the participant's mind to the present, to what is right in front of them. We may be used to raisins, and not used to taking time to actually *notice* them.

“By focusing on the raisin in their hand and making a point to notice everything about it, they are unlikely to be expending energy, time, and attention on worrying or ruminating about other parts of their lives.”

When you follow these instructions and take notice, it is much easier to focus on what is in front of you. If your mind does wander, that is natural too. Gently guide it back to the exercise.

2. The Body Scan

Another popular exercise for practitioners of mindfulness is called the Body Scan. It requires very little in the way of props or tools, and it is also easily accessible for most beginners.

Would you like to follow a Body Scan right now? Try this 30 minute guided narrative by expert and founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Jon Kabat Zinn.

- *Step 1:* the Body Scan begins with the participants lying on their backs with their palms facing up and their feet falling slightly apart. This exercise can also be done sitting on a comfortable chair with feet resting on the floor;

- *Step 2:* the facilitator then asks the participants to lie very still for the duration of the exercise, and move with awareness if it becomes necessary to adjust their position;
- *Step 3:* next, the facilitator begins guiding the Body Scan. Participants begin by bringing awareness to the breath, noticing the rhythm, the experience of breathing in and expelling out. The facilitator explains that nobody should try to change the way they are breathing but rather just hold gentle awareness on the breath;
- *Step 4:* next, the facilitator guides attention to the body: how it feels, the texture of clothing against the skin, the contours of the surface on which the body is resting, the temperature of the body and the environment;
- *Step 5:* the facilitator guides awareness to the parts of the body that are tingling, sore, or feeling particularly heavy or light, s/he asks the participants to note any areas of their body where they don't feel any sensations at all or are hypersensitive.

A typical Body Scan runs through each part of the body, paying special attention to the way each area feels. The scan usually moves systematically through the body, e.g. starting at the feet and moving upwards as follows:

- Toes of both feet;
- The rest of the feet (top, bottom, ankle);
- Lower legs;
- Knees;
- Thighs;
- Pelvic region (buttocks, tailbone, pelvic bone, genitals);
- Abdomen;
- Chest;
- Lower back;
- Upper back (back ribs & shoulder blades);
- Hands (fingers, palms, backs, wrists);
- Arms (lower, elbows, upper);
- Neck;
- Face and head (jaw, mouth, nose, cheeks, ears, eyes, forehead, scalp, back & top of the head);
- The “blowhole” (Fleming & Kocovski, 2007).

After the Body Scan is complete and the participants feel ready to come back to the room, they can slowly open their eyes and move naturally to a comfortable sitting position.

3. Mindful Seeing

For some, the absence of visual stimuli can feel stifling. After all, a healthy imagination does not come naturally to everyone.

The activity of Mindful Seeing may be helpful to anyone who identifies with this.

It is a simple exercise, requiring only a window with some kind of a view. The facilitator guides the group following these steps:

- *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 labeling and categorizing what you see outside the window; instead of thinking “bird” or “stop sign,” try to notice the colors, 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 color or shape again to put you back in the right frame of mind.

4. Mindful Listening

Mindful listening is an important skill and can be a great group mindfulness exercise. In general, people thrive when they feel fully “heard” and “seen,” and mindful listening offers a break from focusing on the self or our own response.

Instead, this form of listening can create an inner stillness where both parties feel free of preconceptions or judgments, and the listener is not distracted by inner chatter whilst learning **valuable positive communication skills**.

The Mindful Listening exercise involves these steps, this can be done with you, your teen or your entire family. It is more effective with groups larger than 2 people:

- *Step 1:* invite your teen to think of one thing they are stressed about and one thing they look forward to;
- *Step 2:* encourage your teen to direct attention to how it feels to speak, how it feels to talk about something stressful as well as how it feels to share something positive;

- *Step 3:* invite your teen to observe their own thoughts, feelings, and body sensations both when talking (and when listening);

- *Step 5:* Ask your teen to reflect on the following;
 - a. How did you feel when speaking during the exercise?
 - b. Did you notice any mind-wandering?
 - c. If so, what was the distraction?
 - d. What helped you to bring your attention back to the present?
 - e. Did your mind judge while listening to others?
 - f. If so, how did “judging” feel in the body?
 - g. Were there times where you felt empathy?
 - h. If so, how did this feel in the body?
 - i. How did your body feel right before speaking?
 - j. How did your body feel right after speaking?
 - k. What are you feeling right now?
 - l. What would happen if you practiced mindful listening with each person that you spoke with?
 - m. Do you think mindful listening would change the way you interact and relate with others?
 - n. How would it feel if you set the intention to pay attention with curiosity, **kindness**, and acceptance to everything you said and everything you listened to?

