

Focus on the Present



Explanation

This is the ACT process of **present moment awareness**. This means flexible attention to the present moment as opposed to being caught up in thoughts about the past or future.

Although it is useful to consider the past and the future, getting caught up in thoughts about the past or future takes away from one's ability to effectively engage in the world, potentially even affecting one's relationships.

This process is often compared to mindfulness or meditation practice, but it does not require any kind of belief or spiritual tradition.

Although it sounds simple, this can be a challenge in practice.

Throughout daily life, we may drift into worries of the future or ruminations on past situations. These thoughts generally start with, "what if.." or "I should have..." and derail our focus on what can be done here and now to most effectively move forward.

Exercise

Here is a simple guided meditation that can help develop present moment awareness:

As you sit with your feet on the floor, notice the sensation of your body in the chair. Now bring your attention to your breath, noticing the rise and fall of your chest. Now notice the sensation of your feet on the floor. Notice any tension in your legs, arms, hands, shoulders, and face, letting it go. Bring the attention back to the breath for a moment.

Now expand your awareness to any sounds around you. Perhaps you may not have been aware of small sounds like a fan, the hum of electricity, people talking, or nature. Simply notice the sounds.

Keep the attention on the sounds while also noticing the breath.

You can now continue in this way for however long without the guidance. If a thought pops up, you can use the previously described leaves on a stream metaphor to refocus your attention.

Why it works?

Getting pulled into the past and the future comes from our yearning for a sense of orientation. We want to make sense of our place in time, often ruminating or worrying. This mindless disconnection pulls us away from being able to flexibly engage in the present. When we are engaged in noticing the present, we can act more effectively.

Being here and now allows for a more flexible, fluid, and voluntary approach to life. Through this mindful awareness, we can better meet our need for orientation without getting caught up in our thoughts, missing the metaphorical off-ramp.