



Healthy & Resilient WORKPLACE

CONCERN: EAP

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Mindful Self-awareness

Does this sound familiar?

You find yourself getting a sweet snack from the vending machine when you hit a roadblock in your project work.

You arrive at work feeling angry and frustrated after being stressed in traffic every morning.

A particular colleague triggers an emotional reaction in you that you can't stop and often later regret. You feel embarrassed by your behavior and realize that you could have dealt with the situation in a more productive and professional way.

The common thread in these examples is unconsciously reacting to what is happening in your life without being fully present in the moment. We may do this by ruminating about our past or future, or thinking about many things simultaneously when we meant to focus on one thing. Or we might spend entire parts of our day on "autopilot." At times like these, stress can go up while productivity and resiliency go down.

When we are mindfully self-aware, we are paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, in our

lives. This means observing and experiencing our thoughts, emotions and physical reactions as they occur. Practicing mindful self-awareness helps us pay purposeful, curious attention to our immediate experiences as they unfold, considering them in a non-judgmental way. This provides a calmness and clarity in how we approach each activity. The concept of mindfulness has its roots in the Buddhist practice of conscious self-awareness and acceptance. Mindfulness has also been embraced by Western psychology.

What can mindful self-awareness do for me?

Developing mindful self-awareness can enhance both psychological and emotional resilience as well as physical well-being. It can help us gauge our strengths and limits, putting us in a better position to make changes like pursuing new goals or dropping bad habits. We may even develop greater self-confidence based on a stronger sense of personal control.

When we become more mindful of our thoughts, feelings, and physical states (such as how stress is affecting us), we can also:



Simple efforts to be more aware of what we are doing can have a meaningful, positive influence on our resilience.

- Better manage our emotions and responses, even in times of conflict or personal change.
- Experience physical health benefits like decreased blood pressure, better sleep and an improved immune system response.
- Experience mental health benefits like higher self-esteem, an increased ability to cope, and elevated mood.

Practicing mindful self-awareness helps at the social level as well. We can become more empathetic and compassionate, effectively navigating personal and professional relationships. Studies show that mindful self-awareness can improve relationships that increase teamwork and decrease personal conflict. It can strengthen a leader's ability to manage employee stress, to motivate others, and to make more intuitive decisions.

Taking the first step

While practices like meditation, tai chi, and yoga are all key mindfulness techniques, greater self-awareness can begin with the simplest of steps, done for just a few minutes each day, wherever you are. You can take your first step in practicing mindful self-awareness by focusing on something very basic – your breathing.

Try this STOP exercise the next time you are feeling stressed. STOP stands for: **S**top, **T**ake a Breath, **O**bserve and **P**roceed.

Stop what you are doing and take a slow, purposeful breath, paying attention to your thoughts, emotions and feelings. Are you stressed? Anxious? Grinding your teeth? At the same time, observe how it feels to slowly inhale and exhale.

It's normal if your mind wanders. Simply acknowledge the distraction and, without judging it, let it fade away. Then take a breath and bring your focus back to the present. The act of concentrating on your breath may help you proceed more effectively. You may realize you need to eat, sleep, slow down, talk to a friend, or simply take another breath.

Mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn offers more ideas for practicing mindful self-awareness:

- Be open to playing with what you are feeling and experiencing in any given moment.
- Use “the beginner’s mind,” seeing everything as if for the first time.
- Take a break from your “to do” list and embrace being in the moment. Notice the world around you. Smell a flower. Listen to the birds. Whether these moments are great or small, you are part of a single moment when all these things come together.

The bottom line

When we are disconnected in the present moment from our thoughts, emotions and sensations, our mind and body can become out of balance. Simple efforts like focusing on our breathing for a few minutes each

***Awareness is like bringing
light to the darkness of
mindless reactions.***

--from Mindfulness and the Mind-Body

day, can have a meaningful, positive influence on our resilience, productivity, and well-being.

Let's take a look at those examples to see if mindful self-awareness could result in more positive outcomes.

You find yourself getting a sweet snack from the vending machine when you hit a roadblock in your project at work, ***You decide to change your habit and take a walk around the building instead.***

You arrive at work feeling angry and frustrated after being stressed in traffic every morning. ***You decide to start listening to podcasts or relaxing music while driving to help manage the stress of the trip.***

A particular colleague triggers an emotional reaction that you can't stop and often later regret. ***Now aware of your reaction, you consciously decide not react to the colleague on an emotional level and instead listen to his/her comments with an open mind.***

Mindful self-awareness can be calming and lead to conscious appropriate responses, rather than habitual negative reactions to stressors.

This information is intended for general information on a variety of resiliency topics. If you find your level of stress interfering with your daily activities or impacting your well-being in other ways, you can contact CONCERN: EAP at (800) 344-4222 or <http://www.concern-eap.com/> for help working through these issues.

References and Additional Resources

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Resources:

- For information and resources on mindfulness go to: UCLA's mindfulness center, <http://marc.ucla.edu/> and <http://www.mindfulnessprograms.com/>
- For resources regarding stress in the workplace, go to the American Psychological Association's Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program website: <http://www.apaexcellence.org/>

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