

MINDFULNESS

Do you tend to worry a lot about the future situations that have not happened yet? Do you think about catastrophizing “what if” types of scenarios? Do you ever get upset about something that happened in the past, mentally replaying a conversation you had with someone else?

Being a part of the LGBTQIA community can offer support from other community members and at the same time, can sometimes bring up a lot of fears about other people’s reactions, about prejudice, bullying, and confrontation.

Some of us spend so much time worrying about the possible future or being upset about the events of the past that we forget to notice what is actually happening *right now* in the present moment. Of course, if in the present moment you are in immediate danger either due to a threat by another person or due to suicidal plans, then focus on getting yourself to safety as your main priority (click [HERE](#) to go to our crisis management worksheet).

If you are not in immediate danger but your body feels like you are, then it might mean that your nervous system is overwhelmed. When we go through something painful or traumatic, such as bullying, abuse, homophobia, transphobia, or other types of abuse, rejection, or discrimination, our body reacts by releasing certain stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol.

These hormones increase our heart rate, speed up our breathing, elevate our blood pressure, and dilate our pupils. These hormones put our body in a “fight-or-flight-or-freeze” mode. This mode is very helpful when we are facing danger, such as when there’s a car coming at you. The more adrenaline you have in your body, the faster you will jump out of the way of danger.

However, when our body reacts to everything as if we are in danger, it likely means that our nervous system is overwhelmed. If this is the case, you might notice yourself feeling irritable when you make a mistake, overwhelmed when you can’t solve a problem, or struggling to be around other people. When this happens to us, we need to help our nervous system to be in balance again. And the way to do that is through mindfulness practices.

Mindfulness means paying attention to what is going on in the present moment, meaning right now. It means noticing how you are feeling right now. For example, mindfulness might mean noticing if you feel anxious, angry, tired, or hungry. Mindfulness also means noticing if you’re holding your breath from anxiety or are tensing your shoulders. It also means noticing what you can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.

If you have ever seen *Star Wars*, you might remember that the *Force* refers to the energy field of all living things. In order to feel the Force, the Jedi and their trainees (Padawans), such as Ahsoka Tano, for example, have to practice mindfulness – noticing what they feel on the inside and what they sense on the outside.

Ahsoka trained to be a Jedi under Anakin Skywalker, who later became Darth Vader, an evil Force user. When Ahsoka is first training to become a Jedi, she occasionally fails and has setbacks. At times, she doesn't think she will succeed or become a good enough Jedi. However, it is when she is able to practice mindfulness that she is truly one with the Force, eventually becoming one of the most powerful Force users of all time.

So how does mindfulness work?

The goal of mindfulness is to purposely focus on what you are feeling, thinking, doing, as well as touching, smelling, tasting, seeing, or hearing. The idea of mindfulness is to notice what you are experiencing *right here, right now*.

Slowing down in this way essentially helps us to better manage our nervous system, so that we are more resilient in stressful situations. Mindfulness practices can reduce anxiety, can help us feel less overwhelmed, and can help us to better care for ourselves.

There are many different ways of practicing mindfulness. You can practice formally by doing a guided meditation practices using mindfulness apps, such as Calm, Headspace, Insight Timer, or listen to a guided meditation practice on YouTube.

Alternatively, you can do an informal mindfulness practice by slowing down your breath or by focusing on each of your five senses (what you can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste) one at a time.

Let's try one brief informal practice: take a few seconds to look around your room. Notice 5 objects that you can see and write them down:

Now, take a few seconds to notice what you can hear (if you are able) and write down what you were able to hear:

Now, take a few moments to take 5 slow breaths. Don't rush yourself. Take as much time as you need. You don't need to force your breath or take big deep breaths. See if you can just take 5 slow, easy, effortless breaths on your own time in your own way. Write down or draw your experience:

Mindfulness practice.

Most people think that in order to practice mindfulness, you have to completely clear your mind of all thoughts or to be able to be fully focused.

That is not the case. In fact, it is not possible to completely clear your mind of all thoughts because our brains were not designed to function that way. Instead, mindfulness is a way of paying attention to one activity at a time at a slow pace, without rushing. For example, mindfulness could mean brushing your teeth slowly and just noticing all the sensations of brushing your teeth.

Any activity can become a mindfulness practice. Eating your favorite food, drinking your favorite beverage, drawing, coloring, reading, or listening to music.

With each of these activities, imagine yourself training to become a Jedi, a witch or a wizard, or a superhero.

Let's do a brief mindfulness practice now. Imagine yourself tuning into your senses to sharpen them, to slow down time, to give you an ability to become more resilient even in the face of the hardest of times.

As we are practicing, you will notice yourself getting distracted and thinking about other things.

This is completely normal.

When you notice that you are getting distracted, take a breath and refocus on this exercise.

To begin, I would like to invite you take a few slow breaths.

- The Force is all around us. It is the energy field of all living things. It surrounds us and binds the Galaxy together. In order to feel the Force, we can set an intention to purposely make a connection with it.

- We can begin this practice with first bringing your attention to your breathing. Notice how your body is moving with each inhale and each exhale. Notice the sensations of your body, as a way of connecting with the Force. Notice the sensations of your feet as they are making contact with the ground, connecting with your own environment.
- Take a moment to notice that at this moment, you are right here, you are not late for anything, you are not in a rush to get anywhere, you are right here in this moment, doing exactly what you should be doing.
- And at anytime, if you get distracted or overwhelmed, you can silently ask yourself, “where is my heart?” to notice any sensations present in your own chest, gently bringing yourself back to the present moment, as if using the Force to gently lower a rock onto the ground.
- Take a breath in, breathing in the Force. Feel it all around your body.
- Then breathe out, using the Force within you to connect with the world around you.
- Breathing in the Force. Breathing out connection with the world.
- Now, take a few moments to focus on the sounds around you, connecting with the Force within you, while allowing yourself to gently breathe as you’re doing so. Now, take a few moments to notice the temperature in this room. Now, take a few moments to notice if there are any smells you can detect in this environment, while continuing to breathe. Now, take another minute to notice the sensations of your hands and feet in this moment. And then bringing your awareness back to this room, take a few breaths, and take as much time as you need to open your eyes and come back into the room, remembering that the Force is with you. Always.

Thank you for taking a few minutes today to practice being mindful and get in touch with your inner superpowers.

See if you can take some time throughout the next week to practice mindfulness.

Here are some other examples of mindfulness activities:

- Mindful eating
- Mindful showering
- Mindful listening to music
- Brushing teeth mindfully
- Practicing mindfulness while walking
- Practicing mindfulness while taking a test
- Mindfully doing the dishes
- Mindfully brushing your hair
- Coloring or creating artwork