

ONE-MINDFULLY.

- Do one thing at a time. When you are eating, eat. When you are walking, walk. When you are bathing, bathe. When you are working, work. When you are in a group, or a conversation, focus your attention on the very moment you are in with the other person. When you are thinking, think. When you are worrying, worry. When you are planning, plan. When you are remembering, remember. Do each thing with all of your attention.
- If other actions, or other thoughts, or strong feelings distract you, let go of distractions and go back to what you are doing - again, and again, and again.
- Concentrate your mind. If you find you are doing two things at once, stop and go back to one thing at a time.¹

One-mindfully develops the skills of attention and concentration. This skill is easier when you are interested in something and much harder when you are not. When you are doing something that you totally love, focusing on it whole-heartedly is easy. Intense total involvement follows from passionate interest. But how do you focus your mind when the activity is not as compelling as your favorite thing to do?

This paper seeks to explain the mindfulness skill *one-mindfully* in conjunction with the other DBT skills of emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance, and the core mindfulness skills. *One-mindfully* is one of the “How” to take hold of your mind skills, along with *non-judgmentally* and *effectively*. The other mindfulness skills describe “What” to do to take hold of your mind and include *observe*, *describe*, and *participate*. I have adopted the format of expanding Linehan’s instructions regarding one-mindfully with my explanations.

Do one thing at a time.

The essence of mindfulness is acting with undivided attention. One-mindfully is the discipline of doing one thing at a time with awareness. *One-mindfully* is the opposite of how most people operate. Most of us think that if we do several things at once, we will accomplish more, but in the behavior laboratory those instructed to do one thing at a time actually accomplished more than those instructed to multi-task.

¹From Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder by Marsha Linehan. © 1993 The Guilford Press

There are several advantages to doing one thing at a time besides increased productivity. When thoughts are racing, concentrating on one thing slows the mind. Doing one thing at a time decreases anxiety by focusing the mind on one thing, pushing from one's mind preoccupations and worries.

You must guard your psychological space like a guard at the palace gate. The guard is alert to everything that happens. Like the guard be alert to every thought, emotion, and distraction that crosses your psychological space. Such mindful watching brings your attention back to the present moment. It is OK to take a zigzag path as you criss-cross psychological space to overcome distractions and return to the object of your attention.

Describe the activity. Putting words on experience or putting your experience into words is a way to stay on track. Using words this way makes you aware of what you are doing.

When you are eating, eat.

It is not unusual to mindlessly eat while watching TV, reading the paper, or walking around. Eating mindfully is very different experience than the way you normally eat. Mindfully eating concentrates on the eating experience. Only in the present moment do you experience the sensations of eating. When you are present you can taste, feel, and smell your food. The sensations are fleeting and there are many distractions. Mindful eating requires a commitment to do so. Eating a meal mindfully entails the effort to *turn your mind* away from distractions and return over and over to eating. You are more likely to notice when you are feeling full when eating this way. If you pay attention to the sensation of satiety, you will probably stop eating sooner. Eating can be an opportunity to learn self-control (directing your mind back to eating) and self-discipline (committing to restarting when you stray).

When you are walking, walk.

Walking, too, can be a way to take hold of your mind. This is mentioned in the *describe* section, "...say in your mind... walking, step, step, step..." Describing walking this way slows your mind and focuses your mental energy on the "here" where you are, how you feel, what you are doing, and your breathing.

When you are bathing, bathe.

Some people have a routine they go through every time they shower that allows them to concentrate on their actions mindfully. Focusing exclusively on this activity is peaceful and calming. Self-soothing with sensations of bathing copes with stress, relieves anxiety, and cultivates mindfulness.

Notice the feel, sound, and sight of water. Notice the smell of soap and shampoo. Notice the difference between wet and dry, hot and cold. Notice the transitions between turning on the water, getting in the water, wetting hair, shampooing, soaping, turning off the water, and drying. You will have the opportunity to repeat your observations daily.

When you are working, work.

Work offers many opportunities for doing one thing at a time and overcome distractions. You may be surprised at how much you can be done if you set your mind to it. Such a commitment helps you learn *mastery*, doing one thing each day to make yourself feel competent and in control.

Think about what your work really is. Consider how your work expresses you and your place in the world. What attitude do you bring to the work you do? What part of your work is play and what part of play is work? What is your life's work?

When you are in a group, or a conversation, focus your attention on the very moment you are in with the other person.

Skills class is an opportunity to practice one-mindfully by devoting your full attention to learning skills.

In conversation, your ability to be interpersonally effective increases by practicing one-mindfully. No matter how nervous you are with another person, focusing your attention on the very moment liberates you from doubt, worry, stress, and fear. Part of one-mindfully is letting go of what is interfering with complete involvement. Try one-mindfully with a "boring" speaker. You might notice he or she becomes more interesting. People become more interesting when you show your interest in them.

When you are thinking, think.

Thinking this way is hard work! To think *one-mindfully*, try practicing the "How" skills *observe*, *describe* and *participate* with your thoughts in your mind. *Observe* is useful because you must be aware of where your attention is at all times. *Observe* is your mind's eye, the witness to the fragile products of your thinking, your ideas. *Describe* is putting words on your

experience of thinking and your experience of your thinking into words. When you enter into the experience of thinking completely, forgetting yourself, you are *participating*. Think without the distraction of judging. Effective thinking is flexible, intuitive and includes multiple perspectives. An inquisitive and open-minded attitude helps you see yourself and others from fresh perspectives.

When you are worrying, worry.

An effective therapy for worry: set aside 30 minutes a day to worry. Go to the same place each day and try to spend the whole 30 minutes worrying. During the rest of the day, banish worries from your mind, reminding yourself that you will attend to that particular worry during your worry time. If you practice worrying one-mindfully, you will be able to turn your worries into planning and thinking. During the rest of the day, you will let go of your worries and free your mind to do something else.

When you are planning, plan.

The essence of planning is setting goals. A workable goal is specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and time-conscious. Your intention to make the future a certain way is an appropriate here-and-now activity. Make plans for a life worth living. Design a schedule of small steps to a future you want.

When you are remembering, remember.

When you are remembering, you are not playing back a tape of the event - you are doing something that is new in the present moment. Voluntary memory is a mental event grounded in your historical experience. There is an act of will in each memory. One could say that memory is conjuring the past, i.e., "evoke or call forth, with or as if by magic." Note that memory takes effort, and if you want to remember something, you need to spend time remembering as many of the connected events as possible.

Involuntary memories are intrusive, come unbidden, and can be quite distracting. One way to reduce the effect of intrusive memories of the past is to use the mindfulness techniques outlined here. It may seem backwards, but the Wise Mind way to deal with intrusive memories is to *observe* and *describe* them *non-judgmentally* (there is no right or wrong). Avoid avoiding memories. Attend to your memory by attending to the present memory - *non-judgmentally observe* and *describe* it, and *participate* with it, if you can.

Accepting your memory is not approving of its' content. Notice it and then *effectively* go back to what you are doing. When you are not *remembering*, focus on the present moment.

Do each thing with all of your attention.

The hard work of doing each thing with all your attention is a choice. A commitment to accepting reality begins the process of turning the mind sustains one-mindfully. Although the idea is simple the result of doing one thing with all your attention is powerful.

If other actions, or other thoughts, or strong feelings distract you, let go of distractions and go back to what you are doing - again, and again, and again.

Step back and be aware of what you are doing. If a thought enters the psychological space between you and the object of your attention, let the thought pass and go back to what you are doing. Distractions will enter your psychological space - let them go and turn your mind. A deceptively simple strategy when you find your thoughts wandering astray is to say to yourself, "Be here now" and turn your mind toward what you are doing.

Concentrate your mind.

Concentration is the gathering of the mind, bringing all the parts together, uniting the mental faculties. Attention is focusing on a selected object. Intuition and curiosity naturally concentrates your mind. One of the qualities of Wise Mind is concentration.

If you find you are doing two things at once, stop and go back to one thing at a time.

Focusing on one thing in the moment does not mean that one cannot do complex tasks requiring many simultaneous activities. Like the dancer on the dance floor, at one with the music and her partner, attend completely to what you are doing.