

Mindfulness & Creativity



Mindfulness, a practice based in Buddhist tradition, continues to be a hot topic and has gained increasing popularity as an effective technique for managing and reducing stress. Many of us already integrate mindfulness-based strategies, and report that the results can often be seen and experienced relatively quickly. It is important to point out that mindfulness is the umbrella term for a number of strategies in a holistic approach toward improved wellbeing.

When mindfulness works it can feel like poetry in motion as it helps us focus, engage in the process, listen attentively, feel grounded in the body and achieve results. For many of us who are working either in the workplace or remotely, we have multiple and competing demands that require decisions daily. Many of our roles require that we apply critical thinking to make an assessment on the task at hand, think further ahead to future strategy; consider past learnings; and put contingencies plans into place. When involved in these tasks, it would not necessarily help to pause and “pay attention to the present moment without judgement” as the widely accepted definition of mindfulness advises. The aim of the mindfulness is to teach us to practice slowing down, notice our intention and use our breath to control our mind. This practice helps us to regulate our emotions, reduce stress, anxiety and depression and do our activities of daily living without internal judgement.

Where to start?



For anyone who is struggling to start being mindful, the easiest place to start is **mindful eating**. When starting any meal, beverage or action around food (including cooking) try to reduce multitasking and focus on the food’s taste and smell. Furthermore, if you have a fork or spoon in your hand, be sure to put it down in between mouthfuls and really chew your food. Similarly, you can also slide into mindfulness slowly by creating a new morning routine with exercise or watering the plants. Mindfulness does not need to be formal, intimidating or overwhelming. A slow but general awareness is a lovely start.

If the varying forms of meditation do not feel accessible or the thought of sitting on a cushion is still too foreign, look at mindful colouring, idle scribbling or putting pen to paper are ways that creativity can help boost wellbeing. Encouraging creativity has a number of beneficial effects that can drive positive change in workplaces and can show up in other parts of our lives. For example, a simple exercise like thinking of different uses for an object can encourage a mindset that will help you to think of new ways to approach and improve processes and outdated practices. Moving from ‘this is how it’s always been’, to ‘this is how it could be better’ requires creativity, mindfulness and courage.

Getting creative



Creativity is a resource that when used effectively can reduce mental health issues and focus the mind (without it being cognitively taxing). This allows the mind to be present and be allow different parts of our brain to shut down. This gives our brains a break, as when our thoughts are racing, or we’re given too much stimulus to process, or we may struggle to think clearly and absorb information. Being creative also creates neural pathways which help with problem-solving. Creativity can take any from art, music, dancing, writing in a journal, reading poetry, singing, gardening, playing with your children, to taking a slow walk in nature. Creativity is a cheap and enjoyable way to improve overall mental health.



Keep it simple



The message here is simple: recognise that mindfulness or any mindful or creative activity are some of several tools that you will need to have in your wellness kit. When, where and how you use it determines its effectiveness and being open to its effects creates success. Often those that need it do it the least.

Being mindful may be that you notice that you are caught up in your thoughts before someone asks if you are okay. Or it might mean enjoying your coffee alone in the sun,

At AccessEAP we have many services in place to encourage self-awareness and self-care. Look at our mindful tips and exercises on our website or app. Mindfulness training can be tailored to specific organisations or provide a more general introduction to the concepts. Coaching is also available for managers who feel they could benefit from one on one session in mindfulness.

Remember, as your EAP, we are here to support you whatever the nature of your concerns. For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

