

Mindfulness

DBT “what” and “how” skills

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment, without judging or trying to change it. Practicing mindfulness can help you manage uncomfortable emotions and improve your relationships.

“What” and **“how”** skills are the components of mindfulness. “What” skills refer to what you actually *do* to be mindful, while “how” skills refer to the mindset you bring to these actions.

“What” Skills

Observe

What it is

Noticing your surroundings and internal experience (thoughts, emotions, and sensations)

What it’s not

Thinking about the past or worrying about the future—anything that takes you out of the present moment

Practice

Choose an everyday activity, such as washing the dishes, and attend to every aspect of the experience.

Example: *In an argument with your partner, you look at and listen to them. You notice their tone of voice and posture. You pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and sensations.*

Describe

What it is

Putting your present experience into words, *focusing on the facts*

What it’s not

Making predictions about the future or assumptions about what other people think, rather than focusing on facts

Practice

View your experience as if from a distance and describe it using the phrase, “I notice that...”
For example: “I notice that *the sun feels warm on my skin, I’m walking fast, and I feel excited for the day.*”

Example: *“I notice that my partner is raising their voice. They’re expressing why they’re upset. My heart is racing. I am feeling the urge to prove that I’m right.”*

Participate

What it is

Committing to your experience, being totally engaged, and going with the flow of the moment

What it’s not

Being on “autopilot,” distracted, and out of tune with your experience

Practice

Immerse yourself in an activity and give it your full attention. Let yourself fully feel any emotion that comes up.

Example: *You turn off the TV so you can focus. You take deep breaths. You want to stop arguing and mend the relationship, so you listen calmly and give your opinion respectfully.*

“How” Skills

Nonjudgmentally

What it is

Viewing your experience neutrally, resisting the urge to label it as “good” or “bad”

What it’s not

Labeling your experience or trying to change it, cling to it, or push it away

Practice

Approach your experience with a neutral stance, noticing without judging.

Example: *“I notice I am feeling angry. I can tell that I want to convince my partner I’m right.”*

One-mindfully

What it is

Taking in experiences one at a time, ignoring distractions

What it’s not

Trying to multitask or attend to all your experiences at once

Practice

Move slowly through one experience at a time, accepting each one as it is.

Example: *You pause and focus on what your partner is saying. You let them know you need a break to collect your thoughts. You slowly assess your experience, one thought and feeling at a time.*

Effectively

What it is

Understanding what you need to do to reach your goals in a situation, giving up the need “win” or be right

What it’s not

Being stubborn and letting your pride get in the way of doing what works

Practice

Set an intention and follow through. Take the long view, thinking about what would actually help, rather than being reactive or impulsive.

Example: *Your goals for the argument are to end it peacefully and mend the relationship with your partner. Though you recognize an urge to prove you’re right, you shift your focus to achieving your goals.*