

# Expressive Therapies

Creating a safe and empowering space for equality with – race, gender, sexuality, age, economic status, cognitive, physical, spiritual needs and those living with mental illness – through trauma-informed care: music therapy, art therapy, and psychotherapy, to improve health and well-being.

Expressive Therapies LLC  
245 N Metro Dr  
Appleton, WI 54913

(920)903-1009  
expressivetherapies.net



facebook.com/  
expressivetherllc



instagram.com/  
expressivetherapiesllc/



## Art, Music, and Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a subject which has really taken off in recent years, both in terms of overall public awareness and mainstream practice.

Mindfulness has roots in Buddhist and Hindu traditions, in which the concept of “sati”—encompassing attention, awareness, and the act of being present—has been loosely translated to “mindfulness,” as we know it today in Western culture. A medical school professional by the name of Jon Kabat-Zinn studied mindfulness under several Buddhist teachers before developing Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a program designed to treat chronic pain, anxiety, and stress. Today, mindfulness has shifted into both a strong therapeutic practice and holds broad public awareness. You can find mindfulness tools in professional practices, as well as in a plethora of online resources and phone apps which

encourage a mindfulness practice. In this newsletter, we’ll explore the general concept of mindfulness, who can benefit, and its purpose and potential. We’ll also discuss how mindfulness is incorporated into music therapy and art therapy and how each of these mediums can support improved attention, awareness, and stress management. Finally, we’ve included a couple simple mindfulness practices for anyone to try out at home!

# Introduction to Mindfulness

## What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present in the current moment, free from distraction or judgement and aware of our thoughts and feelings without being overwhelmed by them. In essence, it is the practice of bringing one's full attention to observing their in-the-moment thoughts, feelings, and senses, without deeming them good or bad, important or irrelevant. They simply are. In this way, mindfulness can be an objective tool for noticing and accepting experiences, even if they are challenging, so that we may more successfully express and manage feelings and emotions.

Mindfulness is a practice, not just a one-time, short-term state of mind. There can be benefits to temporary practices, or it can be a more day-to-day, moment-to-moment practice, so that we may step back, assess, and be more thoughtful in how we respond to any given situation as they arise. Now, mindfulness has gained a lot of ground into mainstream practice and is integrated into a number of established therapeutic practices and approaches.

## Who can practice mindfulness?

Anyone can practice and benefit from mindfulness! The possibilities are endless, and different people can integrate a mindfulness practice in an individualized way. Mindfulness can help address stress, pain, or anxiety in a healthy manner, can improve mood, and can increase focus and provide opportunities for quiet and calm during an otherwise hectic lifestyle. Thus, different people can build a mindfulness practice for any number of reasons and benefit from the awareness and acceptance such a practice brings.

Mindfulness also isn't limited by age—children and teens can engage in a mindfulness practice geared towards their ability level just as effectively as adults can! For some children and teens, mindfulness practice can assist in developing and practicing self-regulation skills. How does my body feel right now? Am I moving really fast, or are my muscles really tense? What emotion am I experiencing? Do I feel “just right” or is

something really bothering me, internally or externally? Mindfulness draws attention to the present moment, to the here and now, which can help support younger or less experienced individuals in learning how to pay attention to what they're feeling, why they're feeling it, and think about what they might do to transition to a different feeling if needed.

In mindfulness practice, feelings and emotions aren't “bad” or “good,” but they might be affecting one's ability to make healthy choices or respond calmly to stressful situations. When we can get back to a “just right” state, we both feel more comfortable and grounded in our present space, and are better able to make healthy choices about tricky situations. Mindfulness, then, can be a tool used at any age to support feeling “just right” and grounded when presented with stressors.

“Cultivation of lasting happiness, then, can be thought of as developing the skills to minimize our suffering and maximize positive states so that our overall well-being, or happiness, is more stable. Mindfulness also leads to the development of a clear strategy for returning to balance when we have slipped into some agitated, contracted, distracted or otherwise negative state.”

Terry Fralich in  
*Cultivating Lasting Happiness* (p. 7)

### 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Use your five senses to ground yourself in the present.



5 Things You can See



4 Things You can Touch



3 Things You can Hear



2 Things You can Smell



1 Thing You can Taste

@SURVIVORANDCO

## When and where can we practice mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice that can be adjusted and adapted to fit almost any situation. It can be as simple and brief as a pause for breathing in the middle of the day. It can be lengthier and more in-depth, like a developed meditation practice. It can fall somewhere in the middle, where perhaps a small part of one's day (such as right after you wake up in the morning, or before you go to sleep) is set aside specifically for some manner of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness can also be any combination or variation of these, in a way best suited to the individual.

## Why practice mindfulness?

There are many potential benefits to a healthy mindfulness practice, including but not limited to: decreased stress and anxiety, improved mood and overall happiness, increased levels of focus, and improved ability to respond to challenges and potential stressors. Mindfulness can also help provide individuals with the ability to acknowledge, accept, and then respond to difficult situations or circumstances, so that they have more choice in how to address the moment and better chances of reacting to struggles with a sense of calm and empathy, rather than judgment.

Mindfulness, as a practice, is a means for enhancing our well-being, balance, and happiness. Throughout our lives we may encounter challenges, negative experiences, and bad moods that can overpower our positive experiences and drain happiness. Mindfulness confronts those obstacles and provides us with opportunities to acknowledge and frame them in a positive light.

Research studies on mindfulness are working to catch up with the massive leaps mindfulness has made in popularity. Though research is young, there is very encouraging and promising evidence that mindfulness-based practices provide benefits to clients and patients that are on par with other existing treatments. Here are some of the potential benefits that continue to be studied:

- Lower blood pressure
- Improved emotional/brain health and increased resilience
- Improved mood and stress management
- Addressing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and trauma
- And more!

If you're interested in learning a little more about how mindfulness specifically interacts with our brains and bodies, check out this TED Talk on mindfulness, or reach out to Expressive Therapies for additional resources!

[How mindfulness changes the emotional life of our brains](#)

## Mindful Moments are:

**Non-conceptual.** Mindfulness is awareness without absorption in our thought process.

**Present-centered.** Mindfulness is always in the present moment. Thoughts about our experience are one step removed from the present moment.

**Nonjudgmental.** Awareness cannot occur freely if we would like our experience to be other than it is.

**Intentional.** Mindfulness always includes an intention to direct attention somewhere. Returning attention to the present moment gives mindfulness continuity over time.

Terry Fralich, quoting Christopher Germer, in *Cultivating Lasting Happiness* (p. 38)





# Music, Art, and Mindfulness

## Music and Mindfulness

Research into music and music therapy has explored different ways that music can be incorporated into a mindfulness practice, such as mindful music listening, mindfulness-based music interventions, singing, and music-supported mindfulness practice. Each of these utilize music in a slightly different way, where music might be a more active part of the mindfulness practice, or it may only serve in a supporting role.

In mindful music listening, we focus our attention on the music and explore both what we hear and our individual responses. We might be listening for specific instruments, such as what instruments are in the music and when they start or stop playing. We also might be paying attention to what particular emotions we might experience in a song, when we begin to feel that emotion, where we feel it in our body, and if anything changes physiologically (e.g. Does our heart start beating faster?). In mindful music listening, we can also explore how grounded the music sounds: is there a strong sense of a ground beat, or does the music seem to be without a sense of beat? Lastly, we can also pay close attention to the melody of a song, such as what direction the melody is moving and when it changes (Moving up? Down? All over the place?). Mindful music listening can be a great practice for focusing our attention and tuning in our awareness to our bodies and responses in the moment.

Mindfulness-based music interventions can be an addition to mindful music listening. We might practice drawing or moving to what the melody is doing after noticing how its progressing. We can also practice drawing or moving to what we hear, specifically what images or pictures come to mind while listening to the music, or how the different instruments or melodies in the song might look on a page. With singing, we can practice mindful awareness of our breath, as well as how our singing expresses different emotions.

We can also practice music-supported mindfulness, which is simply adding a musical presence to a regular mindfulness practice. This might be listening to soft, ambient sounds, or perhaps a simple melody or long, slow musical tones to create an auditory space for a mindfulness practice.

### Mindfulness Drawing

1. Find a quote, lyric, poem, or inspirational word that you love or that is speaking to you today (maybe even right in this moment)
2. Make art around it! Write it out, draw an image, let your creativity flow in whatever way is right for you.
3. Take a few moments to reflect on what you have created, then hang it up as a reminder to yourself or tuck it away for when you need it most.



## Art and Mindfulness

Art can also be an excellent medium for mindfulness practice, incorporating either active art-making or imagery exploration. Mandalas in particular are a well-researched and mindfulness-based art practice.

For more active art-making mindfulness experiences, we incorporate the actual art process into our mindfulness practice. We might engage in focus-oriented art, where we focus our attention on the actual process of making art, rather than on a final product. Here, the purpose is to engage fully in the art-making without making judgements of good or bad. We can also begin an open art-making experience with an intention, and create an image based on that intention or thought. Here, we're narrowing our focus on the intent behind the art-making, rather than the process or the final product.

Guided meditation and guided imagery are effective ways for us to check-in with our present state of being, improve relaxation, and decrease stress. Guided meditation generally follows some manner of pattern or script and brings our awareness to different feelings or thoughts. We might engage in a body scan meditation, where we focus on and purposefully relax our entire body one area at a time, or where we simply notice different feelings in different areas of our body without judgment or efforts to change. We also might engage in a guided meditation focused on a particular feeling, thought or idea, such as focusing on and noticing with great detail our breathing, positive moments, or feelings of calm. Guided imagery is similar, but with an added imagery element. We might imagine a calm place, such as a beach or somewhere else outside in nature, and notice what we might see, hear, or feel. We might also simply notice what images come to mind while exploring a particular intention, thought, or feeling, and create an image based on our experience, such as a mandala.

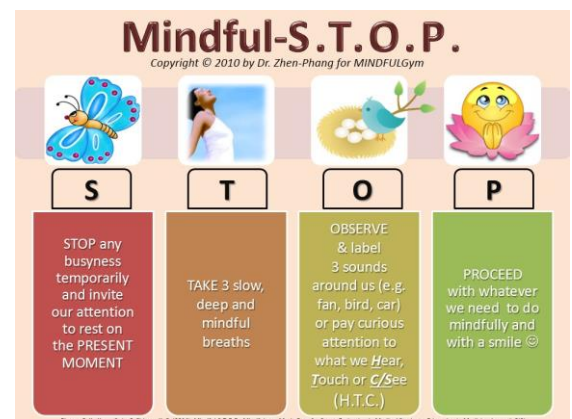
Mandalas are an excellent way for practicing mindfulness. Mandalas appear in almost every culture in the world, though were first seen in Hinduism and were used as a meditative, spiritual tool in Buddhism and other cultures. One use of a mandala (which is Sanskrit for "circle"), is to center an individual and to encourage self-awareness and introspection: mandalas are an artistic representation of deeper meaning and order. One idea for a mandala may be to begin in the middle of the mandala and then gradually move outward to the edges, which can support the individual in focusing first on themselves at the center and then expand to notice their connection to others and wider experiences. Individuals can draw or create their own mandalas, or color in pre-drawn mandalas. In art therapy, we can use mandalas to promote centering, grounding, and a sense of peace, especially as a means for countering stress.

## Mindfulness Practices to Try at Home!

The following two mindfulness practices are simple to try out and can be adapted to fit any age!

### Mindful S.T.O.P

This mindfulness practice is short and sweet and can be utilized at any point throughout your day as a means for grounding yourself in the present and taking a moment to pause before continuing with the rest of your scheduled plans. Each letter in the acronym S.T.O.P reminds us of a specific step. First S, STOP any busyness temporarily and focus your attention on the present. Then T, TAKE 3 deep breaths, followed by O, OBSERVE and identify 3 things you can hear, see, or feel. Finally, P, PROCEED on to rest of your day!



## Eight-Minute Practice to Notice Positive Moments

This is a great mindfulness practice for kids, and adults can use it to! It's important to remind ourselves of our strengths, achievements, and positive moments that bring us joy.

1. **Lie down somewhere comfortable.** Let your arms and legs fall to the ground. Close your eyes gently.
2. **Start to notice how your body changes with each breath you take.** Each time you breathe, your belly moves up, and your belly moves down. If it is easier, put a hand on your belly. Or if you want, put a stuffed animal there.
3. **Each time you breathe, your belly moves.** Your hand, or your toy, rises, and then falls. See if you can count ten breaths that way. Breathing in, *one*, breathing out, *one*. (Repeat for nine more inhales, and nine more exhales.)
4. **When you lose count, don't worry about it.** That's normal, and happens to everyone. Come back to whatever number you last remember.
5. **Now, shift your attention to your day.** Breathing in, focus on your breath as your belly goes up. Breathing out, focus on something that went well today.
6. **With each breath:** breathing in, noticing your belly move, and with each breath out, noticing something that went well today.
7. **Now, picture something about yourself that makes you proud.** Breathing in, focus on your belly moving. Breathing out, picture something that makes you proud about yourself. If nothing comes to mind, that sometimes happens. If that's how you feel, picture what you'd wish for yourself instead.
8. **Finally, bring someone to mind who makes you happy.** Before we end, try one more practice. Breathing in, notice your belly move. And now, breathing out picture someone who makes you happy.
9. **As you come to the end of this practice,** take a few deep breaths, and start to wiggle your arms and legs. Pause and decide what you'd like to do next.
10. **It's normal to have thoughts that make us feel scared or bad.** We should never ignore anything important, but it's useful to focus on the rest of our lives too. Take a few minutes every day to notice what has gone well, and see what happens next.

### THANK YOU FOR READING OUR NEWSLETTER!

We appreciate connecting with the community by sharing the specifics of music therapy and art therapy. If you have further inquiries, we highly recommend you visit our website at [www.expressivetherapies.net](http://www.expressivetherapies.net), our Facebook page (Expressive Therapies), the American Music Therapy Association at [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org) and the American Art Therapy Association at <https://arttherapy.org/>, or email us at [info@expressivetherapies.net](mailto:info@expressivetherapies.net).

Take care and be well!

