

MINDFULNESS OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

WHILE YOU READ, HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT WORDS/PHRASES AND ANNOTATE THE TEXT USING COMMENTS.

I'm sure you are familiar with the classic airline safety instruction, "In the event that the oxygen masks deploy, secure your own mask before assisting the person next to you." This "self-care first" analogy can also be applied to the practice of mindfulness. It is no accident that students new to mindfulness are taught to be mindful of themselves first.

Understanding your own thoughts, emotions, and habits are important foundations to understanding others. Cultivating self-awareness can develop your ability to be more present, patient, and compassionate with the people who surround you every day. These are truly the fruits of increased awareness. When cultivating mindfulness, sometimes we become keenly aware of the places where we are not interacting well with others. Through first-hand experience, you may have noticed times when a lack of awareness of emotion led to acting unskillfully towards someone else, sometimes regrettably. Maybe you've experienced a time when you were in an argument with someone, aware the whole time that you were reacting in a way that you would regret. We all likely have had this experience. When we notice this type of behavior in ourselves, it is an example of when awareness

is present but not strong enough to stop or change our habits of reaction. Sometimes the habits of how we interact and react to certain circumstances and people can be so strongly rooted that all we can do is watch and apologize soon after. With a mindfulness practice, our relationships with our community, colleagues, family, and friends become the ultimate training ground for our awareness and willingness to stay openhearted. One important component of how we interact with others is communication. There are many different forms of communication but for the purpose of this training, we will primarily review the ways we communicate verbally.

THE ART OF LISTENING: GUIDED PRACTICE

We already know that mindfulness increases our ability to pay attention to the things around us. Now we are going to channel that attention into effective listening. Being a skillful listener is a quality that deepens our relationships and connection with others. Skillful listening also enables a better understanding of people's experiences, ideas, and values. To begin, we will guide you through a visualization to get in touch with how much our attention and ability to listen matters in our connection with others.

LISTENING

Doesn't it feel good to be listened to? There is something satisfying and comforting when we feel that kind of attention from someone. Often, it also feels good to give that type of attention to someone else. Being heard is a very important part of communication and friendship. Next time you find yourself in a conversation with someone, practice mindful listening. Consider some of the following as you practice:

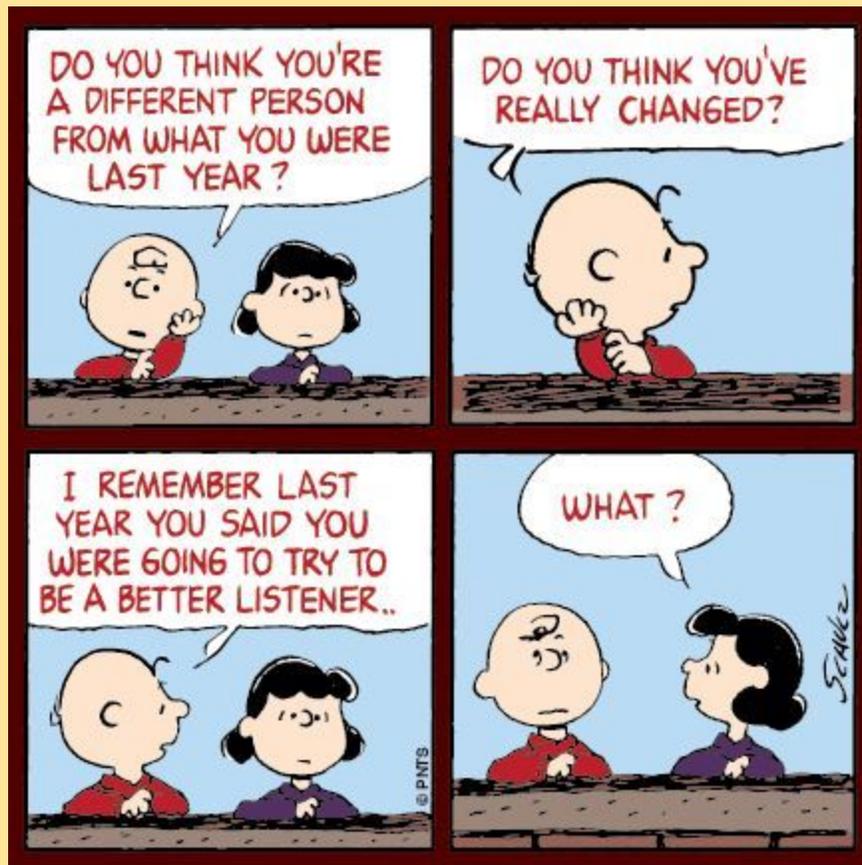
Body awareness: Keep checking in with your body while listening to the other person. This might seem like it's taking some of your attention away from the other person, but it will keep you aware of your own emotional reactions and thoughts while listening to what's being said. You can do this quickly, without it becoming a major distraction. This will become important later when it's your time to speak.

Eye contact: Eye contact can be a wonderful way to direct your attention on the person speaking, especially if there are distractions going on around you. I personally have noticed that I easily break eye contact when I get sidetracked by something like a sound. Breaking eye contact then becomes a signal to myself that I'm not paying close enough attention to the person in front of me or that I've lost interest. There are times when it might be easier to close your eyes. Of course, this is usually

considered rude when you are in conversation with someone but might be appropriate during a lecture or class.

Listen for the underlying significance: Listening to someone is not just about taking in the verbal sound they generate; it's about understanding why the person is saying what they're saying. Pay attention to whether they are asking for advice or if they just needed to share without feedback. Notice if there is emotion like fear, anger, excitement, or joy at the heart of what they are saying. Observe if they are open hearted or if they are distant or disconnected. Taking into account their body language and tone of voice can sometimes help reveal these subtleties. As with all other things we bring mindfulness to, see if you can make these observations without unnecessary judgment or assumptions.

Ask for clarification: If you are not clear about the significance in number three, ask clarifying questions so that you can better understand. An example might be "Do you want me to give feedback?", or "Am I understanding what you're saying?"



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GUIDED MEDITATION FOCUSING ON LISTENING

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