



When difficult thoughts and feelings show up, we tend to take actions that lead us away from the kind of person we want to be and the kind of life we want to live. We listen to what our mind says, usually without question, which, because it's trying to look out for us, encourages to avoid the hard stuff, take the less risky road, and stay stuck doing what we've always done whether it works or doesn't work for us. We do this on automatic pilot, with little awareness, because we are creatures of habit and instinct. In mindfulness, we are trying to increase our awareness of this and build the skill of noticing and accepting rather than avoiding.

The uncomfortable inner thoughts and experiences you have aren't laws or rules, you can have them and also choose to take action to move you towards what you want and how you want to be in the world, holding both, rather than I can't if I have these difficult experiences/feelings/thoughts etc. It's a mind trick, avoiding what I need to do = I feel better. It's a short-term strategy where you feel better in the moment, but long term it moves you away from the kind of person you want to be and what you want your life to look like. The mind encourages you to avoid, in the promise that it's better/safer/easier. If we don't pay attention to what our mind is telling us, we are like a puppet on a string, being jerked around by its content and getting stuck in old habits.

In Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, this is called fusion and avoidance of discomfort, getting stuck on the content of our minds and doing what it says and feeling things in our body that we don't like and so choosing actions that numb or distract us in order to not feel. Here are two mindfulness experiments for you to try, these help you to put some distance between your inner experiences and what you do with them, if you can do this you then have more choice about the next action that you take:

Experiment - Fusion

When a judgemental, critical thought shows up, repeat it for approximately 20 seconds then sequentially add in each of the following before the thought and repeat each for 20 seconds:

- 1) I'm having the thought that...
- 2) I notice I'm having the thought that...
- 3) I'm aware that I'm noticing that I'm having the thought that..

How true does that feel now? How powerful does it feel now?

Experiment – Avoidance of discomfort

When uncomfortable sensations in the body show up, we try to get rid of them, numbing, distracting, sometimes with alcohol or endless scrolling. Being mindful means opening up and making room for them, allowing them to be there but not push you around. Next time try to notice and name the feeling or sensation, and observe by saying:

- I'm noticing sadness
- Here's that anxious feeling
- I'm noticing the feeling of

Or at any time try to notice:

- How's my breathing, is it shallow and fast or slow and relaxed?
- How are my shoulders/neck etc feeling? Tense or relaxed?