

Being Present is the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) process of bringing attention to what is happening here and now with openness, curiosity, and awareness. Rather than becoming lost in memories of the past or predictions about the future, mindfulness allows people to notice their immediate experience as it unfolds.

Being present does not mean having an empty mind or eliminating difficult thoughts and emotions. Telling yourself, “Don’t think about it,” is thinking about it. Instead, it means noticing what is happening without automatically judging it, changing it, or reacting to it.

For example, instead of thinking, “I have to stop worrying,” being present might mean:

“I am noticing worry right now. I can feel tension in my shoulders. I can hear the wind. I am breathing. I am here.”

Mindfulness-Based Ecotherapy (MBE) integrates present-moment awareness with intentional connection to the natural world. Its twelve skills build upon one another, with *Mindful Awareness* and *Living in the Now* providing particularly direct connections to the ACT process of *Being Present*.

The purpose of this worksheet is to practice moving from thinking about the present to actually experiencing it.

Part 1: Where Is Your Attention?

Take a moment to notice where your attention is right now.

Are you primarily focused on:

- ☐ The past
- ☐ The future
- ☐ What other people think
- ☐ What might go wrong
- ☐ What I need to accomplish
- ☐ What is happening right now
- ☐ A mixture of these

When your attention leaves the present, where does it usually go?

What thoughts tend to pull you away from the present?

What emotions tend to pull you away from the present?

Part 2: Arrive Here

MBE's Living in the Now skill emphasizes intentionally returning attention to immediate experience when the mind becomes caught in memory, anticipation, judgment, or distraction.

Pause.

Take one slow breath.

Notice that you are here.

Now complete the following:

I can see:

I can hear:

I can physically feel:

I can smell:

My breathing feels:

The most noticeable thing happening inside me right now is:

The most noticeable thing happening around me right now is:

Part 3: Being Present in Nature

If possible, complete this exercise outdoors.

Find a place where you can sit or stand comfortably. You do not need to accomplish anything. Your only task is to notice.

Spend several minutes observing your surroundings.

Look closely at one natural object.

It might be a tree, leaf, rock, flower, cloud, animal, or patch of grass.

What do you notice when you slow down enough to really look?

Listen carefully.

What sounds are present that you might normally overlook?

Notice movement.

What is moving around you?

Now notice something that is not moving. What is it?

What happens when you allow yourself to simply observe without needing to name, evaluate, or change what you experience?

Part 4: The Mind Wanders

The mind will wander. This is not a failure of mindfulness. This is just what minds do.

Notice what happens when your attention leaves the present. Does your mind wander?

This happens because the past and the future only exist in your mind, and leaving the present means letting your mind wander to the past or to the future. When this happens, notice what your mind is doing.

My attention commonly wanders toward:

When I notice that I have wandered, my first reaction is usually:

Instead of criticizing myself, I can say:

“My mind wandered. That’s what minds do. I can come back.”

What happens when you return your attention without judging yourself?

Practice this sequence:

Notice → Allow → Return

Notice where your attention went.

Allow yourself to have whatever experience is present.

Return your attention to this moment.

Part 5: Being Present With Difficult Emotions

Being present does not mean being present only when things feel good.

Choose a difficult emotion you are experiencing or have recently experienced.

The emotion is:

Where do you notice it in your body?

What does it feel like physically?

What happens when you observe the sensation without immediately trying to make it disappear?

Complete the sentence:

“Right now, I am noticing _____.”

Now say to yourself:

“I don’t have to solve this moment. I can simply experience this moment.”

Did your thinking change when you were able to be present in the moment with it? If so, how? If not, why not?

Part 6: From Automatic Pilot to Conscious Choice

When people operate on automatic pilot, thoughts, emotions, habits, and environmental cues can trigger behavior before there is an opportunity to choose a response. MBE’s *Mindful Awareness* practices emphasize noticing this process and creating space for more intentional choices.

Think of a recent situation in which you reacted automatically.

What happened?

What did you notice in your thoughts?

What did you notice in your body?

What did you do?

Now imagine inserting a mindful pause:

STOP

S — Stop.

Pause before reacting.

T — Take a breath.

Notice your breathing and body.

O — Observe.

Notice thoughts, emotions, sensations, and surroundings.

P — Proceed.

Choose what to do next.

If you had been fully present in that situation, what might you have noticed?

What choice might have become possible?

Part 7: My Practice of Being Present

A situation in which I want to practice Being Present is:

The thoughts that may pull me away are:

The emotions that may pull me away are:

The physical sensations I can use as reminders to return are:

Something in nature that can serve as an anchor for my attention is:

When I notice that my mind has wandered, I will:

One small way I can practice Being Present today is:

Key Takeaways

- Being Present means intentionally bringing attention to what is happening now.
- Mindfulness does not require eliminating thoughts.
- A wandering mind is not a mindfulness failure; noticing the wandering is part of the practice.
- Being present includes thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment.
- Nature provides a rich source of sensory anchors for returning attention to the present.
- You do not have to change an experience before you can be present with it.
- The sequence **Notice → Allow → Return** can be practiced anywhere.
- A mindful pause creates space between what happens and how you respond.
- Being Present supports greater choice, awareness, and connection with the living world.

A Final Practice

The next time you find yourself thinking about what happened yesterday or worrying about what might happen tomorrow, pause.

Take a breath.

Look around.

Listen.

Feel your feet beneath you.

Notice what is happening inside you.

Notice what is happening around you.

Then remind yourself:

“I don’t have to be somewhere else right now. I am here.”

Being Present is not about making the moment perfect. It is about actually being here for the moment you have.