

An invitation to Mindful Walking,



Give yourself permission
to unwind.

Buddha Doodles

We all know that walking is good for us. Simply put, exercise is one of the three pillars of wellness-- exercise, sleep and nutrition. And it just feels good to get your body moving and to be outside.

Having said that, have you ever gone on a walk and spent the whole time lost in thought? Body is walking, and Mind is: Planning; problem solving; fixing; list-making; worrying; or re-hashing some difficult moment. Sometimes I catch myself walking on my beautiful country road and yet the whole time I'm thinking about all the things I'll do as soon as this walk is checked off my to-do list.

Paying attention to what you feel like when you're walking can give you valuable information. If your mind is all over the place and you are following every whim of a thought pattern...where are you walking? Are you walking amongst the trees? Are you walking in this late summer air? Are you walking under the blue sky with the big puffy clouds overhead? Or are you walking in the past or future? Mind lost in thought.

What does it feel like when you are walking with your body on auto pilot "mindlessly" knowing the way AND your mind is busy doing what it does best...thinking?

Give yourself permission to walk. Permission to JUST walk. Permission to take in the sights and sounds and smells all around you as you walk. Permission to step out of autopilot and into the mindful awareness of your experience while walking. Permission to let go and re-charge.

To promote mindfulness while walking try bringing gentle awareness of your experience using each of your senses. I invite you to try the following mindful walking practice on your next walk outside.

Start your walk by setting an intention to walk mindfully. Pausing before you set out on your walk and inviting yourself to walk mindfully. Inviting yourself to allow thoughts to simply come and go. As you notice thoughts coming (remember, aiming for zero thoughts is unrealistic and not what we are going for—mind WILL think) lightly allow them to pass by.

As you start out on your walk, look up ahead. Choose a spot in the landscape ahead of you. Maybe the next tree or the next hydro pole or that mailbox up ahead. Focusing your attention on noticing everything you SEE from now until you get to that chosen spot up ahead. Noticing everything that comes to your eyes. What colour is the sky? Noticing the texture of the sidewalk. Do you see leaves? Grass? Cars? What colours do you see? Birds? Paying mindful attention to all that comes to your eyes. If your mind wanders off, very gently invite mind to take a break and come back to what you see around you.

Once you've walked to that chosen marker, look ahead and choose another spot up ahead. Maybe a tree or a stop sign just ahead. This time focusing your attention on noticing everything you HEAR from now until you get to that next marker. Don't reach for sounds. The point is not to strain and push and force yourself to hear things. Just noticing whatever sounds come to your ears. Observing the sound of your feet as they make contact with the surface you're walking on. The sound of the wind. The sound of cars coming and going. Try to follow a particular sound. What happens when you pay attention to that sound? Do you hear any birds? Bees? Flies?

Once you've walked to that marker, look ahead and choose another spot on your path. Setting your attention on noticing anything you SMELL from now until you get to the next marker. Cut grass? Falling leaves? The Mill? Dampness in the air? What is there to smell around you? When you notice your mind has wandered, just say "there's me thinking" and gently invite your attention back to the experience of smelling whatever comes to your nose.

For the next bit of your walk, focusing your attention on noticing sensations you FEEL. What does your body feel like as you walk? Noticing the sensations of your feet touching the ground. Focusing your attention on the sole of your right foot...what does it feel like as you place it on the ground? What do your legs feel like as you walk? What sensations do you feel on your face and head? Warmth from the sun? Coolness from the air? Wind whipping around your face or at your backside? Noticing what your body feels like in this moment.

Once you've reached the last marker you set for yourself....allow yourself to notice what THIS walk feels like. What has it been like to walk MINDFULLY PRESENT to your experience? Did you find it unpleasant? Was it difficult to invite your attention back to your senses again? And again? And again? Did you

enjoy it? Is mindful walking different than how you would normally walk? Could you bring this mindful attention to any other daily tasks? What about washing the dishes? Brushing your teeth? Showering?

"The mind can go in a thousand directions,

But on this beautiful path,

I walk in peace.

With each step,

A gentle wind blows,

With each step,

A flower blooms"

--Thich Naht Hanh

Warmly,

Becky and Shelley



Absolute attention is prayer.

-Zen Proverb