

Noting Practice: Self Compassion

An important tool used to develop mindfulness is the practice of noting. The idea is **to make a soft mental note whenever a particular thought, emotion, or sensation arises**. This helps us to become more consciously aware of what we're experiencing. If I note that I feel angry, for instance, I become consciously aware that I'm angry. If I note that my back is uncomfortable as I'm sitting at my desk, I become consciously aware of my discomfort. This then provides me with the opportunity to respond wisely to my current circumstances. Perhaps I should take a few deep breaths to calm down or stretch to relieve my back pain. The noting practice can be used in any situation and helps engender mindfulness in daily life.

For this exercise, find a relaxed position and sit down for about ten to twenty minutes. Get comfortable, close your eyes, and simply note whatever thoughts, emotions, smells, sounds, or other physical sensations arise in your awareness. For example: "breathing in," "sound of children playing," "itch in left foot," "wondering what to wear for the party," "insecurity," "excitement," "plane flying overhead," and so on.

Every time you become aware of a new experience, acknowledge the experience with a quiet mental note. Then allow your attention to settle on the next experience it is drawn to.

Sometimes you'll find yourself lost in thought and realize that for the last five minutes you've been thinking about your lunch and have forgotten entirely about your noting practice. Not to worry. As soon as you notice that you've been lost in thought, simply note "lost in thought" and turn your attention back to your noting practice.

We can train our brains to pay better attention and become more aware of what's happening to us moment to moment. This skill offers a big payoff in terms of allowing us to be more fully engaged in the present, and it also provides us with the mental perspective needed to deal with challenging situations effectively.

Also available as a guided meditation in MP3 format at www.self-compassion.org