

Observe Walk # 1

For Adults or Parents with Teens.

We have all heard that living mindfully increases happiness, but what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is... experiencing and participating fully in the present moment, without judgment. One of the ways mindfulness can be developed is through observation and conversation about what it is your senses are telling you, especially when walking in nature.

It sounds fairly simple, but how is it done? Why is it that when I try to clear my mind, it fills with thousands of thoughts immediately? The answer is that mindfulness is a practice, just like practicing any other skill. When you do it more frequently, it becomes easier. Part of practicing mindfulness is not judging yourself for your imperfect mindfulness practice. When your mind wanders, simply and gently bring it back.

Turtle Pond - Find a spot a little way from others where you can gaze out at the pond. Plant your feet and feel yourself arrive. Put away distractions. Zip phones into pockets.

Now take several deep breaths, breathing out as slowly as you can. As thoughts enter your mind, notice them without judgment. Bring your mind back to the present, to the lake and nature. Breathe in slowly, letting your breath out slowly, focusing on your body. Be present.

Spend several silent moments, noticing sights, smells, and sounds before you **move on**...



Tip: As you walk, use your senses to notice and experience colors, textures, smells, and the sounds around you... Walk in silence down the second path to the right to get to the **White Cedar Trail**.

Continue walking until you reach **Prairie Platform** - Sit down on the bench, or stand nearby. Watch the waving grasses of the prairie and the trees in the distance. As you rest, become gently aware of the worries you have brought with you today. Spend a moment thinking about these worries, finding them inside your body. Where do you hold the worry? Find the spot and then imagine breathing out the worry. As you leave the prairie, allow the worry to remain in the grasses, loosening from you as you get further and further away from the platform.

Relationship Crossroads—Post #31- Rest a while, letting your eyes follow the trees up to the sky, listening to the sounds around you. Begin to become aware of the connections between yourself, this beauty, and those around you. Think about someone important in your life... what are some of their best qualities? Think of one thing you can say to that person or do with that person that would bring you closer together. Reflect on the connections between all humans and the important role you play in making the world a better place.

Stay right, following the path and watch for the moment when the scenery changes.

Nature's playground- The trees invite you in and it is suddenly darker. Go off the path and explore. What is under the ferns? Allow yourself to be five years old and discover interesting places behind the pine trees. Children are naturally mindful; allow your younger self to be your teacher in this moment.

Stay right to follow the **White Cedar Trail**. Continue to closely attend to the sensations you are experiencing.

Maple Trees- At the post marked **#35** is a beautiful maple tree, its bark pocked with signs of drilling for syrup, and burrowing insects. Examine the tree, noticing its rough bark, its leaves, its roots, and its place in the surrounding woods. This tree is imperfect, scarred, a hard worker, and an integral part of the nature preserve. It is loved by many. Think about the people in the world that love you and care about you, despite and because of your imperfections... Think about the people in the world that you love and care about... Take a moment and feel the connections that you have in this world, that are forged by the caring you and others have for one another.

Follow the **trail around the bend and over the bridge**. Head **right and then take a left back into the woods** at **Post #21**. Walk in silence and concentrate on the sounds around you. As you continue down the path, you carry with you the knowledge that you are valuable and unique and have touched people throughout your life in ways you will never even know.

As you again see **Turtle Pond**, reflect upon your time on this walk. How best can you continue the practice of mindfulness in your life- spending moments pausing for breath during the headlong rush that is modern life. Thank yourself for the gift of this time and focus. Go back out into the world and bring with you some of the peace you have cultivated.