

Observe Walk #3

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.

This Mindfulness Walk will help you to use the beauty of your natural surroundings to bring self-forgiveness. You may do this walk alone, or with others. The recommended trail begins at the **Turtle Pond** trail, but you can use it on any trail by reading the prompts whenever you want during your walk. Please read slowly, with pauses.

Put away distractions. Zip phones into pockets. Now take several deep breaths, breathing out as slowly as you can.

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. 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 of appreciation, noticing sights, smells, and sounds before you move on...

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Go straight and take the second right towards the prairie.

Prairie Platform – Bad feelings (such as guilt) come when you look back at some situation and tell yourself, “I should have done something differently.” You wish things would’ve turned out differently. These feelings lead us to feel so bad it actually makes it harder to work on improving ourselves.

Take a moment to take in the beauty of your surroundings. Step away from the past, setting it down and allowing nature to hold your guilt for you as you walk away.

Take a right at the crossroads and stop at the large white cedar tree.

Should - Think about the word “should” and how it makes you feel. Try replacing “should” statements with “I wish” ones. “I wish I had known...” “I wish” instead of “should” is designed to remove judgment. Removing judgment is central to mindfulness. How do these “I wish” statements make you feel? Again, practice putting down the past. Imagine setting it down next to a tree and walking away. As you walk pull yourself into the present moment, leaving judgment aside.

Continue straight pass the crossroads on the grass trail, continuing to another prairie with some benches. Continue down to a clearing by a quarry pond.

Letting it go - Become fully aware of your body and yourself, planting your feet and holding yourself straight. Have you ever heard the expression, “Hindsight is 20/20?” It means that once something goes wrong, it is pretty easy to see what could have happened to make it all go fine. You look back with 20/20 perfect vision. Everything is clear. In the moment we make the best decision with what we knew at the time.

Turtle Pond - Mindfulness is based on the idea we are all doing the best we can AND that we can always improve. You are worthy of love and forgiveness despite mistakes you have made.

You can use the knowledge you have gained from those mistakes to improve yourself. Take this practice forward in your life.