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FOCUS & ATTENTION GROUP

1 of 7: Where is Your Attention?

Increase awareness of your wandering mind.

One of the first steps in learning how to gain control of your attention begins with realizing just how much our minds wander. Researchers estimate that we are only present about half the time. This means that our attention is either focused on the past or the future, instead of the present. When our attention is not focused on the present, it's like what's going on right here and right now didn't happen. We often think there's something wrong with our memory, when it's more likely that our minds missed what happened while thinking about the past or the future. Consider that your attention is much like a camera. Whatever it's focused on is what's remembered and experienced.

The purpose of this exercise is to help you become aware of just how much your mind wanders and explore ways to build your ability to control your attention. As you begin to practice, you'll become aware of your constant inner dialogue and how much your attention wanders. You may even feel a little frustrated that you can't control it. Everyone feels this way.

The reason is that we have conditioned ourselves to be constant thinkers. Making this transition to a quiet mind may feel a little uncomfortable. However, with this practice, you will experience what it's like to become aware of your wandering attention and learn a couple of techniques to help you live more in the present.

During this exercise there will be periods of silent pauses. During this time, focus on your breathing and explore how your attention wanders.

- Let's begin by closing your eyes or lowering your gaze. And connect to your body by taking a few, slow and even breaths (pause 10 seconds). Continue breathing, following the rise and fall of your breath (pause 10 seconds)
- Simply notice the ebb and flow of your breath; breathing in & out. (pause 5 seconds)
- When a thought arises, don't try to stop it. Just visualize this thought as a cloud floating away or a leaf floating gently downstream. (pause 5 seconds)
- Continue to follow the rise and fall of your breath; breathing in & out (pause 5 sec)
- As another thought arises, acknowledge it...watching it float away (pause 5 seconds).
- If you find yourself dwelling on a thought, release it by saying something like "not now" and continue with your breath (pause 5 seconds)

Just know that everyone has thoughts and it may seem like they're continuous. You may have even felt a little anxious during this exercise. That's perfectly normal. Just know that every time you notice that your attention has drifted, and you're able to release your thoughts, you're building attention strength and rewiring your brain to be more present so you can enjoy everything life has to offer.

Before we leave this exercise, take a moment and consider times when you'd like to take a few moments to focus on your breath to help you build your attention strength.