



“To be calm is the highest achievement of the Self.”

- *Zen proverb*

# MINDFULNESS

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# BACKGROUND

My interest in this has got nothing to do with being a RS/RP teacher. I have been interested in mental states since my time studying Philosophy of Mind back when I did my MA in 1999-2000.

Philosophers like David Chalmers highlight the difficulty in accurately describing or talking about mental states. I found this fascinating, and was drawn to any research that highlighted unusual mental events.

For example: <http://www.npr.org/2010/12/15/132078267/neurotheology-where-religion-and-science-collide>

When I became a teacher, I found that I was struggling to ‘switch off’ – following a full-on day, I would either want to collapse, or I would find my mind churning over the 100 plates I had spinning in my head.

I attended a Body Balance class which had elements of Pilates, Yoga & Tai Chi

# PRACTICE

For two minutes, try and think of **nothing**

**...It's incredibly hard!**

# THE MODERN MIND

Bombarded by challenges and demands, our minds are arguably under more daily stress than any previous human generation:

“...In past generations, it was just the mortgage that had to be paid monthly; now we have regular payments on credit cards, store cards, cars and even the smartphones that have perpetuated our ‘always connected’ cycle, and extended the reach of the office beyond the traditional nine to five. Modern life is full, breathless and packed with new pressures. Maybe in the face of these pressures, it is natural that anxiety and depression are on the rise. Modern lifestyles are simply incompatible with positive mental health for some people – for *most* people, even. We are extending the fringes of human experience and fraying around its edges.”

- Richard Carlton-Crabtree, *The Independent* 10/10/17

# THE MODERN MIND — IN 6<sup>TH</sup> FORM

...And it's even worse for **you!**

You are the first generation to have grown up with both smartphones and tablets — as a consequence, you have all become used to an incredibly fast technology that give you running updates and demand your attention.

Add in to that the very real pressure placed on you to succeed and it's understandable that your minds may suffer from very acute **anxiety**

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/teenagers-exam-stress-gcse-a-levels-numbers-rise-mental-health-a7896011.html>

# WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is a concept that come to be a cover-all for a **lot** of different techniques.

In short, it is meditation, pure and simple. However, what *kind* of mindfulness you practice can change dependent on who you learn it from:

Zen Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism

Taoism

Guided meditation

...What I intent to do today is teach you a technique for 'switching off' the everyday noise

# MINDFULNESS IN PRACTICE

You should aim for **10 minutes a day** practice

This can be done whenever suits you best: first thing in the morning, lunchtime, after school...Whenever you can get 10 minutes

It can also take lots of different forms: You can practice mindfulness while **walking** with practice, sat in your car, on the bus...Wherever!

There **is no great secret** to it – obviously, Eastern thought is often surrounded with mystical overtones, and people want to earn a living, so they'll want you to pay – but it's really a case of **finding a practice that works for you** and then practicing regularly.

# MINDFULNESS IN PRACTICE

Options include:

1. Breathing exercises: Simple in principle, but tough in practice. Learning to focus your breath, and in doing so unwinding and ‘switching off’ your brain requires a lot of application. You can always ask me for advice or you can attend the **Mindfulness of Breath sessions – Tuesday in T6 at 1:40**

2. Guided meditation: There are lots of YouTube videos that will do this for you – but beware: as is always the way with the unregulated internet, the quality varies wildly. The best thing to try is the **Headspace app** for your phone. The first 10 are free (there’s no pressure to sign up for any more)

<https://www.headspace.com/>

Another similar service is ‘Stop Breathe & Think’:

<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/>

3. Walking meditation: This isn’t for everyone, but there is a tradition in Theravada Buddhism of meditating whilst walking: It asks that you focus purely on your steps – inhale for 3 strides, then breathe out for 3. The rhythm and metronomic nature of your strides can help you reach a state of calm and focus

<http://www.online-stopwatch.com/full-screen-interval-timer/?c=ftbq0ki1ic>

# MINDFULNESS WITH STUDENTS

My experience with students is **slightly** different:

1. It's not for all students: You're here because you wanted to be – sometimes students are incredibly hostile towards it, some really shouldn't be reflecting on what could be a (potentially) rough morning or afternoon. As mentioned – this shouldn't be seen as a mental health 'cure' **at all!**
2. It works best when it's explained as a revision aid; something that's a tool and a method to help them achieve/improve
3. I find that students in year 7 really struggle with it
4. There's still no firm academic evidence that it has a positive benefit on performance, so I wouldn't push to make it compulsory in school