

Mindfulness in ACT for PTSD

[Click here to watch the video](#)

- It's normal for the mind to flip between past, present, and future.
- The client is unlikely to make significant changes without practicing new skills and behaviors in the present moment.
- Mindfulness includes being nonjudgmental, curious, and purposeful in one's attention.
- It's not synonymous with meditation.

Sonja Batten, Ph.D.

Mindfulness: Concept



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**There's no moment other
than the present moment**

- Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Where you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hachette Books.



Within the ACT model, there is no moment other than the present moment.

Although humans can remember things that have happened before and imagine and plan for things that have yet to happen, the past and the future are really just hypothetical constructs. The only moment we have is now and now and now.

References

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

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Using Verbal Language



Learn from
the past



Plan for
the future



Take effective action
only in the present

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Because of our ability to use verbal language, we can learn from analysis of what has gone well or poorly in the past and we can often plan effectively for things in the future. However, the only perspective from which we can take effective action is the present, the here and now.

References

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

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The more attention we give to the past and the future rather than the present, the less able we are to behave with psychological flexibility and to respond appropriately to the natural consequences of our immediate environment.

References

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Problems When Focus Isn't on the Here and Now

Depression

- Focused on the past

Anxiety

- Worried about the future

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If you think about it, many of the problems that bring people into therapy have at their core some sort of problem with keeping attention and focus on the here and now.

For example, people who are depressed are often focused on things that happened or did not happen in the past. And individuals with anxiety disorders, for example, are often consumed with worries about the future.

References

Batten, S. V. (2011). Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy. SAGE Publications Ltd.

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Lack of Contact With the Present Moment



Daydreaming



Ruminating



Dissociation



Substance use



Self-injury

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Lack of contact with the present moment can be demonstrated as daydreaming, ruminating, or even dissociation. And in extreme cases, individuals can go to great lengths to remove their contact with the present moment through behaviors like substance use or self-injury.

So, what does it mean, exactly, to be in contact with the present moment or to practice mindfulness?

References

Batten, S. V. (2011). *Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

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Mindfulness



Participatory nonjudgmental observation of the present



Has a purposeful quality



Has a vital, creative, and connected quality

- Luoma, J. B., Hayes, S. C., & Walser, R. D. (2007). *Learning ACT: An acceptance and commitment therapy skills-training manual for therapists*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Gunaratana, B. H. (2002). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Wisdom Publications.
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One definition that I particularly like describes mindfulness as participatory nonjudgmental observation of whatever is occurring in the present.

And Kabat-Zinn adds the specification that there is a purposeful quality to mindfulness. Just being swept away by the moment is not the same as being connected to the present moment.

And from an ACT perspective, Luoma and colleagues suggest that contact with the present moment can be described as having a vital, creative, and connected quality.

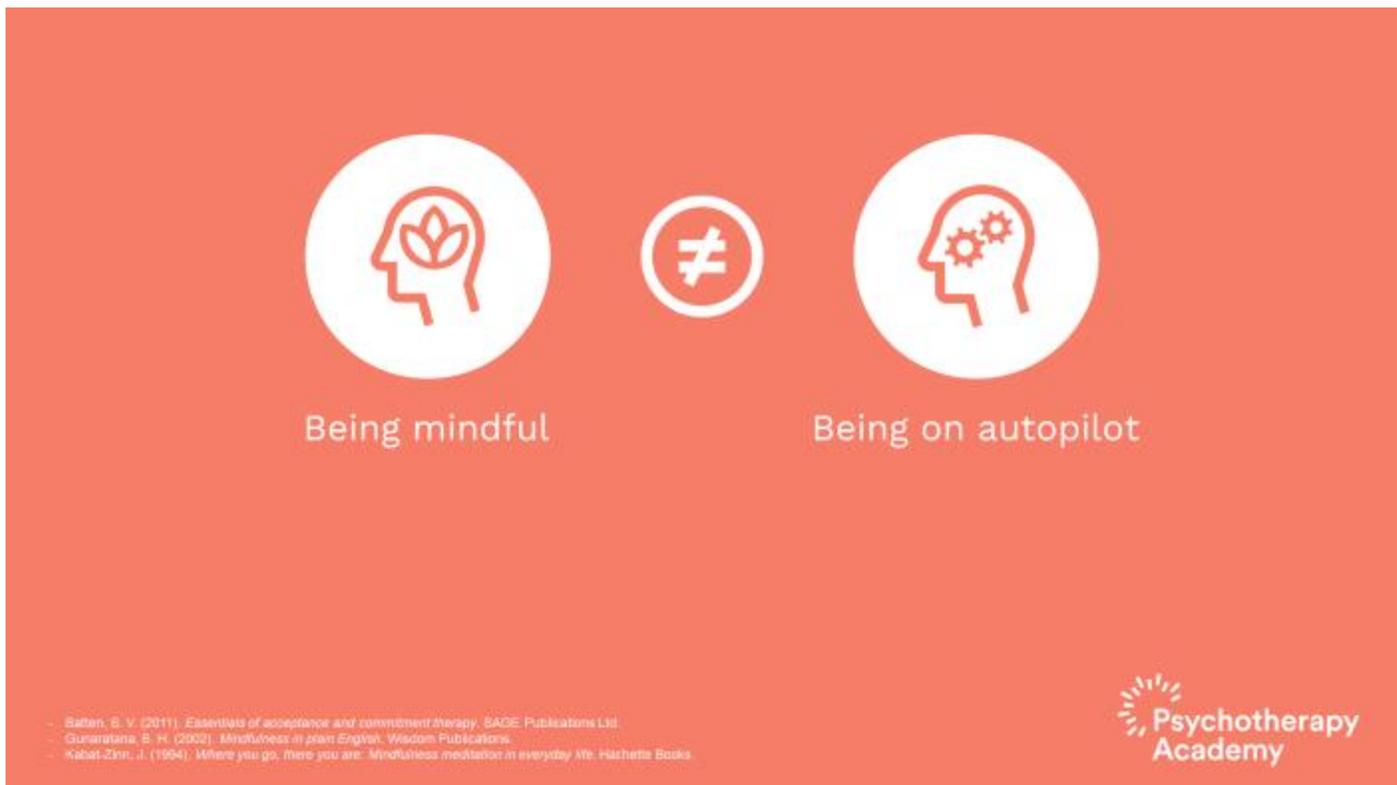
References

Luoma, J. B., Hayes, S. C., & Walser, R. D. (2007). *Learning ACT: An acceptance and commitment therapy skills-training manual for therapists*. New Harbinger Publications.

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So, being mindful and aware as we go through life, as we make large and small choices, is what ACT suggests as the primary antidote to behavior that might otherwise feel like it's happening on autopilot.

References

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Now, one common misconception is that mindfulness is the same as meditation. It's really important to note though that mindfulness practice does not necessarily require formal meditation, although some forms of meditation are certainly consistent with the present moment focus.

References

Batten, S. V. (2011). Essentials of acceptance and commitment therapy. SAGE Publications Ltd.

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Why Practice Mindfulness



Build the capacity
for staying in the
present moment



Be mindful rather
than reactive

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We can practice mindfulness with any activity to which we can bring purposeful, nonjudgmental attention to the experience in a way that builds the capacity for staying in the present moment.

Over time, the idea is that individuals can learn to be mindful of, rather than reactive to, even the most challenging thoughts, feelings, memories, and bodily sensations.

But in order to build that capacity, it can be helpful to work with the client on many different forms of practicing mindfulness and contact with the present moment. I will introduce several examples in the next video.

References

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Key Points

- It's normal for the mind to flip between past, present, and future.
- The client is unlikely to make significant changes without practicing new skills and behaviors in the present moment.



So some key points. Although it's normal for the mind to flip between past, present, and future throughout the day, without sufficient time spent in contact with the present moment, the client is unlikely to be able to make significant changes without practicing new skills and behaviors in the present moment.



Key Points

- Mindfulness includes being nonjudgmental, curious, and purposeful in one's attention.
- It's not synonymous with meditation.



Mindfulness includes characteristics of being nonjudgmental, curious, and purposeful in one's attention and is not synonymous with meditation.

