

Try this **Centering Points** exercise working toward mindfulness and focus. It is by Donna Torney, MA, LMHC, RYT, from her soon to be released book *Mindfulness for Emerging Adults: The Center Points model for well-being*.

Focusing basics for the severely distracted

But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is, I am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?

—Henry David Thoreau

Goals:

- Taking a look at small and easy ways to build mindfulness and focus
- Rating exercises from most to least accessible/doable in your daily life

Starting a meditation practice is a great idea especially with all the research that shows the mental and physical benefits it can bring. But there are times in life (usually when we most need it) when sitting still and calming the mind can seem like a feat of Olympic proportions.

Exercise:

Here are some ideas to find moments of tranquility, even in the most hectic of times. Read through each exercise, then rate them by assigning three stars to the exercise you would be most likely to try today, two stars to an exercise you are willing to try tomorrow, and one star to an exercise you can commit to trying by the end of the week. Commit to completing a three star exercise as soon as possible.

Take note of what is distracting you – If you don't feel ready for a meditation practice it's okay. Start by noticing what is distracting you.

- Are your distractions fear-based; are you worrying about some future outcome?
- Are your distractions fantasy-based; is there something you don't have that is stopping you from living your life in the here and now?
- Start by noting what takes you out of the present moment. Just taking note of what is keeping you in a state of distraction is a step toward more mindfulness.

Perform a single routine task mindfully – fold laundry, wash dishes, feed the dog, without slipping into autopilot. So often, we get up in the morning and do our routine in zombie mode.

- Get out of bed and stretch for half a minute.
- What is the first thing you usually do in the morning? Can you do it with all your senses engaged?
- Resist automatic thoughts and mentally rehearsing your to-do list.
- You might find that the routine task is actually enjoyable, or you may decide to change the start of your day so that the very first task is something that feels pleasant, like reading a few pages in a good book versus checking your email.

Take a slow walk or run – Routine exercise is another place where we can easily check our focus.

- Take your walk or go to the gym as usual, but consciously slow down your pace.
- Notice something new about the gym or the walking/running route you are on.
- Refrain from projecting into the future or thinking about the past. Sure, you may burn a few less calories by slowing down, but what you gain in tranquility and calm will more than make up for it.

Pet or play with an animal – If you have one, your dog or cat can become your Zen master.

- Take time out today to be with your pet and *just* with your pet. Animals are experts in being in the present moment.
- Get down on the floor and get on your pet's level. Gaze into their eyes as you play with or pet them.
- Thank them for being your Zen master.

Belly breathe with a baby or small child – Babies and young children can also anchor us to the present moment in a special way.

- If you have an infant in your life, take some time to watch them while they nap. Babies have not learned the bad habit of taking shallow breaths. Take long, slow breaths like a baby.
- If you have a toddler in your life, ask him or her to lie on the floor next to you. Place pillows on your bellies. Watch them as they float up and down on your belly as you take long, deep inhales and exhales.
- Take some time to giggle with your toddler as the pillows rise and fall.

Walk barefoot – If the temperature allows, kick your shoes off and walk in the grass for a few minutes.

- Walking barefoot requires mindfulness to avoid sharp objects or other outdoor goop.
- It is also immensely grounding and healing.
- Focus on how it feels to connect directly with the earth.

Meet your energy level with self-compassion. If you are low on energy, or going through a stressful time, it can be counter-productive to try to force yourself to concentrate harder. Use the above suggestions to anchor yourself in the present moment in small doses that will add up to improved mood and concentration. By practicing small doses of mindful focus, the fog will lift and you will feel more energized.

Which exercise can you commit to today? Choose a few of the focusing exercises that seem most accessible to you. Write a plan stating how and when you will try the exercises. Journal about them.