Introduction to Mindfulness

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?
Being mindful is cultivating a process of living in the moment in a way that focuses our attention in an active, open, and intentional way. Mindfulness allows one to observe what is occurring in the moment and interact with that moment thoughtfully. The process of being mindful helps us become more aware of our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, sensations and urges in a manner that suspends criticism and judgment and develops our power of non-critical observation.

WHY SHOULD I PRACTICE MINDFULNESS?
We are often bombarded by the activities of life and do not take enough time to naturally observe what is transpiring in our daily lives. Our minds are often looking at and evaluating the past and trying to predict future events or outcomes. This keeps us from being in the moment and appreciating the gifts of the present.

Benefits of mindfulness may include:
- Mental clarity
- Improved concentration
- Inner peace
- Calmness
- Relaxation
- Equanimity (calm in times of chaos)
- Responding vs. reacting
- Eliminating suffering

Therapists at CAPS often present mindfulness as part of a therapeutic approach to relieve stress, anxiety, and depression. Mindfulness is part of a therapeutic approach called Dialectic Behavior Therapy (Linehan, 1993) and is a core skill used to address interpersonal effectiveness, emotional regulation, and distress tolerance. Mindfulness combines both Eastern Zen and Western contemplative philosophies to broaden our attention and awareness and thus bring about effective change.

HOW DO I PRACTICE MINDFULNESS?
Core mindfulness is comprised of six skills that are developed with practice and patience. The first three make up the “what” skills of mindfulness and include;
- **observing** or attending to our experiences. We observe how we are responding to a situation or event without trying to change it. We work to simply become more aware of what is occurring around us and inside of us.
- putting words to our experience so that we can **describe** what we are experiencing as accurately and fully as possible. It is putting words to the data. This is done in a way that separates the experience from the interpretation of the experience, such that if I feel confused it does not mean that I am stupid; I am simply confused at the present time and need more information so that I am no longer confused.
- allowing yourself to **participate** in the moment. Participating in a way that lets you approach the moment without self-consciousness, lets you respond intuitively and be more present in each moment.

The next three skills make up the “how” skills of mindfulness and include;
- approaching your experience **non-judgmentally**. This means that you don’t negatively evaluate the experience. Eliminate the good or bad interpretation. Acknowledge the helpful and the harmful in the experience but try not to judge it. Focus on taking a non-evaluative approach. Examine the experience by looking at the consequences of the behaviors or situations.
• **doing one thing at a time or being one-mindfully.** Practice focusing on one task at a time. Do each thing with your full attention. It is the opposite of multi-tasking. Let go of distractions and let your mind come back to the moment as you practice controlling your attention.

• **effectively** approaching situations and tasks with what works. Try to focus on understanding and acting skillfully in the situation according to the goal. Do what might be necessary in a situation keeping an eye on your objectives.

Interested in learning more about mindfulness and ways to integrate these practices? Call 765-494-6995 to schedule an appointment to speak with a counselor.